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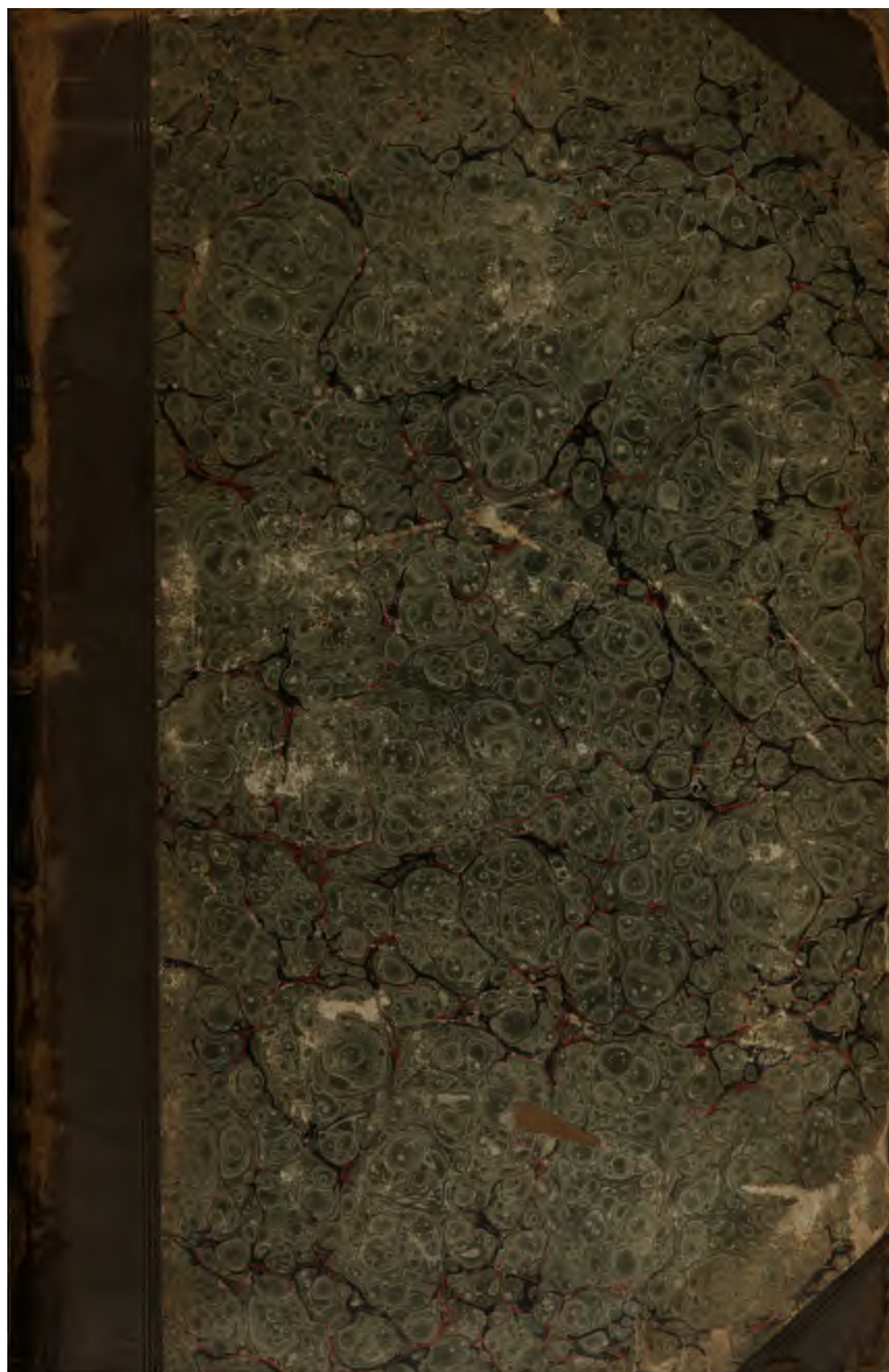
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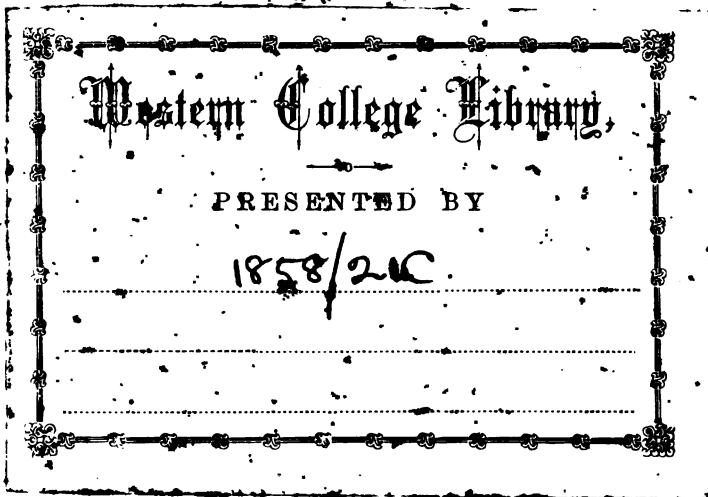
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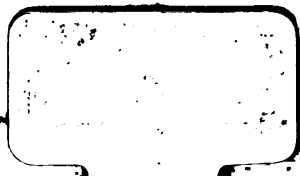
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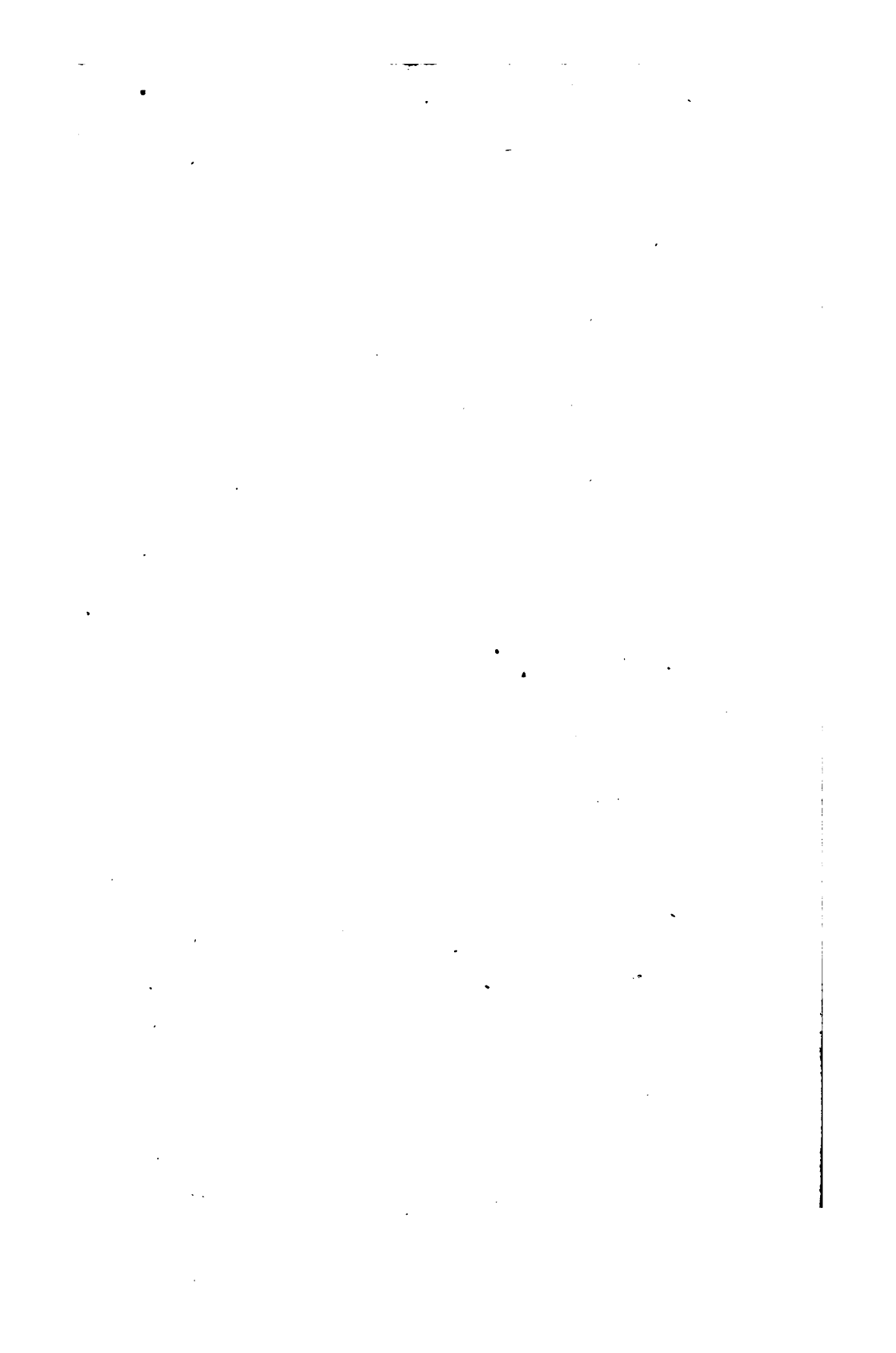
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ON

Protestant Nonconformity.

BY JOSIAH CONDER.

"We are to be concerned for this interest, not merely as the cause of a distinct party, but of truth, honour, and liberty; and I will add, in a great measure, the cause of serious piety too."

DODDRIDGE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.
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MDCCCXVIII.



PREFACE.

THE present Work is an attempt to redeem the subject of which it treats, from the disadvantages of fugitive controversy. Hitherto, the principles of Nonconformity have never been fairly and explicitly exhibited, as a coherent system of religious and political truth ; owing, in part, to a circumstance which must be allowed to reflect some credit upon the Dissenters. All, or nearly all, the publications upon the subject have been, on their side, of a defensive nature, originating in some unprovoked polemical aggression on the part of their opponents. This was the case in the controversy between Archbishop Whitgift and Cartwright ; it was the case with the “ *Melius Inquirendum*,” the “ *Mischief of Imposition*,” by Vincent Alsop, and the other replies to Bishop Stillingfleet, by Richard Baxter, John Howe, and Dr. Owen ; with Pierce’s learned “ *Vindication*,” in reply to Dr. Nichols, and De Laune’s “ *Plea* ;” with Boyce’s Reply to the Bishop of Derry ; and lastly, with Towgood’s “ *Letters to White*.” In all of these, consequently, the reader’s attention is disproportionately occupied with the business of personal

vindication and rejoinder, with discussions foreign from the main question, often degenerating into mere logomachy, and with references to matters of temporary interest, which, although rendered necessary by the immediate occasion of the several publications, add but little to their permanent utility. In controversial works of this description, if any thing like an abstract proposition is employed as an argument, it too often assumes the shape of an indefinite dogma, which stands itself in need of being demonstrated, rather than that of an admitted principle, or established conclusion, which might serve as the medium of proof. In some of the writers alluded to, the reasons of Dissent are made to consist of a series of objections, which a scheme of wider comprehension would annihilate; in others, the doctrine of political right occupies too prominent or too exclusive a place among the grounds of Nonconformity. Between moral right indeed, and religious duty, the connexion is indissoluble, and the present question admits of being stated in either form,—in its relation either to right or to duty; but in reference to a practical question, the simplest and in every respect the most advantageous line of argument, is to be deduced from the nature of religion, rather than from the abstract, and more embarrassed ground of personal right. In the following pages, therefore, the chief stress is laid upon considerations arising out of the design and essential character of Christianity.

The Author has not written with the view of pleasing a party, nor yet with the ambitious hope of operating a change in the opinions of those who entertain opposite views of the subject. The work is primarily designed for the use of Protestant Dissenters. To others, whose curiosity may induce them to open it, it will perhaps afford some information; and if it should have only this effect—to make them respect more the principles of those from whom they differ, so innocent a modification of their sentiments, will be no disservice to either party.

To one class of Nonconformist readers, some apology may appear due, for the introduction of sentiments on one controverted point in which they cannot be supposed to acquiesce. On the maturest consideration, no alternative presented itself. In opposing the false views of the ordinance of Baptism, countenanced by the Church of England, which constituted a prominent objection to Conformity on the part of the ejected ministers, and which have also been pleaded as one of the reasons for a recent secession from the Establishment, it seemed incumbent on the Writer to exhibit what he conceives to be the proper light in which the Scriptures authorize our regarding the institution, notwithstanding that it led him to touch upon points respecting which Nonconformists themselves differ. Nothing, in his view, more directly tends to promote the spread of the anti-pædobaptist opinions, than the Baptismal ritual of the Church of England.

Deeply impressed with the dangers of controversy, the Writer has been unfeignedly solicitous not needlessly to offend, but he dares scarcely anticipate that he will be exempted from the blame so freely imputed; and too often deservedly imputed, to controvertists of every party. In laying before the public the present work, the fruit of some application during hours rescued from sleep and relaxation, he feels to have performed his duty, and he does it at all risks. He has friends, however, valued friends, some of them ministers, attached to the Establishment, to whose esteem he would earnestly deprecate any thing which seemed to diminish his claims. Yet not even to them can he offer any apology for his principles, or stoop to compromise them. The view which he has taken of the tendency of religious Establishments, even should it be deemed erroneous, will, he trusts, justify his earnestness, with those who give him credit for sincerity, in advocating what he regards not as the cause of a party, but, to adopt the words of the excellent Doddridge *, as the cause "of truth, honour, and liberty, and, in a great measure, the cause of serious piety too."

* "Free Thoughts on the best Means of reviving the Dissenting Interest."

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ON
PROTESTANT
NONCONFORMITY.

BOOK I.

§ 1. **O**N all subjects which admit of controversy, there must be taken for granted certain ascertained or received truths, as the common basis of the reasonings of each party. It would be not only unavailing, but impracticable, to engage in argument with a person with whom we have not some ideas in common. A difference of opinion presupposes an agreement of understanding up to the point at which that difference originates. If the matter in dispute be the colour of an object, there is, probably, no disagreement with respect to its form; or if the nature of a thing be contested, each disputant admits its existence. The necessary preliminary, then, to all controversial discussions, is, to ascertain the proper basis of agreement, to discover the exact point at which the

Necessity of ascertaining fundamental principles, common to both sides in a controversy.

difference of opinion takes its rise. If a man has proceeded so far in demolishing within his own mind the grounds of certainty, as to doubt the existence of a God, still, if he is possessed of sanity, he must admit his own existence; and this being admitted, it is not impossible to deduce from this simple fact, a demonstration of the truth which he denies. There is in moral truth a force of vitality so imperishable, that, like a seed, the most minute particle is capable of multiform development, carrying forward at every stage a nature infinitely reproductive.

The relations between moral truths the most remotely connected in appearance, are not less certain and necessary, than those which are the subject of experimental induction, or of mathematical demonstration. But the first principles of moral science, are less easily ascertained, because the facts to which they relate, do not fall under the cognizance of natural reason. Man is not purely intellectual, nor perfect as a moral being; his faculties, therefore, are not in all cases adequate to trace out the order and connexion in which things really subsist. Truth, however, is not the less certain, because knowledge is uncertain: the reality of light is shewn by the shadows which it casts. There is a degree of truth, which is requisite to give plausibility to error, for it is very rarely that opinions are found to rest simply on what is false. Some-

thing that partakes of the nature of certainty, forms the substratum of our speculations and reasonings on all moral subjects; and to determine what these certain principles are, into which the controversy resolves itself, and to follow them out into their genuine consequences, wheresoever they may lead us, is the only method by which we can come to any satisfactory decision.

§ 2. In all religious inquiries, the possibility, the existence, and even the excellency of religion, are taken for granted; but seldom do disputants think of comparing their ideas as to its nature. The term Religion is so familiar, that every body supposes there is a general understanding as to its meaning: it is, however, sufficiently obvious, that it has two distinct acceptations. In its primary meaning, it denotes that sense of a Divine Being, or principle of faith, which is admitted to constitute the philosophical distinction of the human creature,* inasmuch as it elevates him in capacity above the level of brutal imperfection. The faculty of knowing and holding converse with his Divine Originator, is that which imparts infinite value to his being, and forms the purpose of its immortality. "Capable we are of God, both by understanding and will: by understanding, as he is that sovereign Truth which comprehends the rich treasures of all wis-

Definition of religion as opposed to irreligion.

* Herbert
De Veritate.
See Howe's
Living
Temple,
Part I. C. 2.

- “dom; by will as he is that sea of goodness
 • Hooker. “whereof whoso tasteth shall thirst no more.”*

That religion is, in some way or other, necessary to the happiness, as well as to the perfection of man, appears to have been the sentiment of all ages and all nations. The savage is conscious of indefinite emotions, not referrible to the visible objects which surround him; and the blind worship which his fears prompt him to offer, is not merely a recognition of an Unseen Power, but an indication of his belief in the possibility of holding communion with the Divine presence. Religion consists in the habitual reverence of God.

There is a secondary sense in which the term is employed in common usage, as implying a system of belief and worship connected with the exercise of the religious principle. In this sense, we speak of a true, or a false religion, and of different religions; but the sacred Scriptures never authorize us to contemplate Religion as consisting in a system; they describe it as the action and business of the heart; and the only legitimate qualifications of which, taken in its genuine acceptation, the word admits, respect either the reality of its existence in the heart, or the degree of its prevalence in the character.

General distinction
among men,

“All men have not faith.” Setting aside the consideration of the origin of the fact, it must

be confessed that there is an obvious difference among individuals, even though they may profess a belief in the same religious doctrines, in respect of the habit of belief. There are in fact two grand classes, into which mankind have, under every modification of their moral circumstances, been visibly divided; *viz.* the religious, and the irreligious. Without losing sight for a moment of the essential difference between a superstitious fear of "The Unknown God," and an intelligent sense of the Divine Attributes, we may extend the application of the remark, to the times of the darkest ignorance, during which, while some of the heathen were occupied in blindly feeling after the Deity, if by any means they might find out the Almighty, others distinguished themselves by a wanton impiety, a profane indifference to all considerations respecting the Unseen Being, and an after-state. Profaneness is a degree lower in irreligion, than the very grossness of idolatry. The term profane, has, it is true, been frequently misapplied by the votaries of superstition, for even the first Christians were charged with Atheism; still, we must regard the conduct of those who, amid all the errors and delusions of paganism, discovered an anxious solicitude to discharge their obligations to their unknown Creator, as indicating principles at any rate superior to those of the sensual and irreligious

as either religious or irreligious.

multitude. In some instances, there was certainly an approach to the character of genuine though uninstructed piety.

This essential difference in regard to the exercise of the religious principle, is not less observable, where the doctrines of Christianity are recognised by the nation at large as the rule of faith and worship. There is a carelessness about the consequences of admitted truths, evidenced in the practical disregard of all the considerations founded on religious belief, which may consist with an unhesitating assent to the evidence of Christianity, leaving the character of the individual to manifest its independence of the understanding by all the obvious qualities of irreligion. In what proportion of instances the admission of the truth of Christianity is unattended by any moral influence, it is unnecessary to inquire; the fact is unquestionable. The sense of a Divine Being, as an infinite reality, seems to be altogether latent in the minds of many individuals, whose apprehensions of religious doctrine are as accurate as instruction can impart; and although the outward conduct may be neither profane nor flagrantly immoral, all the appropriate evidences of devout belief are sensibly wanting. Religious instruction is the means of awakening the principle of belief, but it is perfectly manifest that it is not an instrument of inherent or universal efficacy. It is

not a cause adequate to produce that change in the disposition, which is involved in the individual's becoming habitually reverential towards the objects of faith, and consistent in the regulation of his conduct by the principles of religion. When we say that a man has changed his religion, it does not always imply that he has become religious; he may only have undergone a rational change of sentiment on certain subjects connected with Christian belief; a change which a Pagan or a Mahommedan may experience, and yet remain destitute of that faith which is the essence of true religion.

That change of sentiment which consists in a person's receiving as true, that of which he previously doubted from ignorance, is the effect of knowledge rather than of faith. It is no act of faith, for instance, to receive as true, upon the ground of external evidence, the historical records of the New Testament, since that evidence is of a nature which renders doubt irrational. There is a sense in which it may be said that we believe in all the objects of our knowledge; but the principle which the Holy Scriptures denominate faith, respects objects which can be known to the individual only in consequence of his believing in the testimony which assures him of their reality: it is a knowledge which consists in belief; not a simple apprehension of their existence, but a sense of their truth.

Operation
of the reli-
gious prin-
ciple.

The end of Religion is to bring the mind into immediate contact with the unseen objects of faith—to reunite the soul to God in that actual intercourse of which spiritual beings are capable. It is evident, therefore, that Religion cannot consist in knowledge, because knowledge has no such property. The knowledge of the existence or of the qualities of an object, is not uniformly accompanied with a sense of its excellency. In order to its having any influence on our affections, there must exist in our moral nature some correspondence with its attributes or character. There must be some degree of likeness where desire exists. It is not then by a simple effort of the intellectual faculty, but by an exercise of the active powers of our nature, that our minds become so united to an object, as to receive its moral influence, and to derive enjoyment from its presence. Faith, therefore, is not to be considered as a mere act of the understanding, because its properties, as described in Scripture, are such as are peculiar to the active principles of man: its tendency and design are to unite our minds to those invisible things which, by believing, we know to exist, assured of their reality by the very feelings—the hopes and joys which they inspire.

It is of vast importance to distinguish faith from religious knowledge, although the connexion which subsists between them, is inti-

mate and essential. "Faith cometh by hearing:" but that in which our knowledge originates, is the means only, not the cause of our believing. We are *commanded* to believe; but did belief, in the scriptural acceptation, relate simply to the understanding, would it have been enjoined as an act of obedience? Is there any thing of a moral character in a mere exercise of reason, that should constitute it a matter of duty? Must not Faith, then, to be a moral act, relate to the disposition of the heart, as essentially involved in its exercise? Faith is, indeed, a rational act; it is nevertheless the result, not of reason, for then all men who can reason would believe, but of religious obedience, in respect of which, men of exactly the same intellectual advantages, differ infinitely. Faith or belief implies a certain degree of previous knowledge; but the measure of our knowledge is so far from being the measure of our duty, that we are encouraged to expect its increase as the effect and the reward of faith: "If any man will do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." There is as much scope for the exercise of that disposition of mind in which Faith originates, at the lowest degree of knowledge or of probability, as at the highest attainable points of clearness and certainty in the comprehension and assured persuasion of the truth.

The "obedience of faith" consists in the sincere reception of the mysterious facts which compose the substance of the Christian Revelation, on the ground of Divine testimony. Christianity is a system of facts; its doctrines are facts, facts which could not have been known, had they not been revealed, and which are understood only in proportion as they are believed. Nothing short of Divine testimony affords an adequate or rational ground for believing them; and it is a devout regard to the "witness of God," that constitutes the excellence of faith. To the facts themselves, and to the practical consequences which result from them, there exists a native repugnance in the human heart, which is the true source of unbelief: on this account, faith partakes of the nature of a moral requirement. Where this principle, however, really operates, it will secure the admission of every essential truth; nor can there possibly exist a fundamental disagreement among those who religiously believe, taking the Scriptures as the only and sufficient rule of faith.

Religion, then, whether it be taken to imply the habit of devout belief, or the act of worship, is a principle which terminates upon the Divine Being as its object, implying "a delightful and affectionate sense of the attributes"* of his revealed character. Love to the Divine Being,

* Scougal.

must be allowed to form, even on the principles of pure theism, the first obligation of a rational creature. Upon the breach of this duty, the unrelaxing severity of the Moral Law denounces the penalty of everlasting death. The Christian Revelation has introduced no change in our natural obligations, no change in the nature of religion; but it renders a peculiar modification of this primary duty indispensable in all to whom this revelation is conveyed. It is necessary that the exercise of the religious principle should in all respects correspond with that manifestation of Deity, which forms the basis of the Christian economy, and which is conveyed in those words: "God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." In consequence of this, religion and irreligion become respectively distinguished by new peculiarities of feature, and "faith in the Lord Jesus Christ" is henceforth inseparable from the idea of the creature's primary duty to the Divine Being; the Father having "committed all judgement unto the Son, that all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father." The relative character which the Son of God has been pleased to assume, as the Head of the Church, constitutes him, in an especial sense, the object of the believer's devout regard; so that love to the Divine Redeemer, is uniformly represented in the New Testament, as the essen-

tial characteristic of the religious principle, and the bond of Christian fellowship. "Peace be with all them," says the great Apostle, "that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." In these words a definite line is drawn between the religious and the irreligious, which no sophistry can obliterate. We can have no correct notion of religion, which is not comprised in this definition. It includes the exercise of every duty of which the light of nature informs us, superadding those which originate in the discoveries of Revelation. It implies every fact connected with the Christian system, the reception of which is essential to the character of a believer. It shews us that the existence of the principle of religion, may consist with multifarious diversities of opinion, respecting the philosophical relations of abstract truths, the circumstantialities of Christian worship, questions of polity, or the niceties of systematic arrangement. We are left at full permission to treat with all the freedom of rational argument, human opinions on points of inferior importance, without danger of losing sight of the inseparable connexion between the existence of the religious principle, and the belief of the fundamental truths of Christianity.

Moral design of all Christian institutions, as means of religion.

§ 3. Assuming that this representation of the nature of religion is admitted to be correct, we proceed to remark, that the general design of

all Christian institutions, is instrumentally to subserve either the production, or the more perfect development, of this spiritual principle in the minds of individuals, for this is all that can be meant by the promotion of religion. The ordinances of the New Testament, unlike the typical and positive institutions of the Jewish economy, are uniformly of the nature of moral means; the end they are designed to answer is, the excitement of faith. "These things are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, ye might have life through his name." The ultimate object of the Apostles, in the promulgation of the Gospel, was far from being the mere establishment of the miraculous facts which constituted the basis of their doctrines; it was to produce a change in the hearts of their auditors, from which alone their cordial belief in those facts, repugnant as they were to their prejudices, and offensive to the pride of reason, together with their profession of that belief in the face of hostility and opprobrium, could be expected to result. The circumstances attending the first preaching of the Gospel, rendered it extremely improbable that motives of less force and purity than such as originated in this moral change, should induce any individual to join himself to the Christian society. Those circumstances, indeed, tended to disqualify a person

who was not under the operation of superinduced motives of commanding efficacy, for appreciating with impartiality the evidence by which the authority of Christianity was attested. Belief, therefore, was in itself an indication of the existence of religious principle; but the Apostles, far from being satisfied with gaining the assent of the understanding to the truth of their doctrines, uniformly insisted on the necessity of its connexion with suitable moral dispositions. "Thou believest? thou dost well: the demons also believe and tremble." "*Repent*" "and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out."

The propagation of Christianity was destined to accomplish the most beneficial changes in society. Its indirect influence has had more effect in advancing civilization, and in meliorating the temporal condition of mankind, than all the previous speculations of human philosophy. Its reflex operation on individual character, arising from its tendency to raise the standard of public morals, is obvious to familiar observation. In these respects it may be contemplated as a political good. But what benefits soever to nations or to individuals, short of the ultimate object of their mission, might result from publishing the truth, the Apostles appear never to have viewed them as comprised in the design of the Gospel, or as

worthy of being estimated in the amount of their success. The triumphs to which they looked forward, respected the hearts, rather than the understandings—the salvation rather than the secular interests of men. It was not a sentimental revolution that they aimed to achieve by the establishment of the Christian creed, but the expulsion of the powers of darkness from every seat of their infernal tyranny. Christ crucified was not a mere symbol, to be displayed on the banners of the Church; it was the grand reality which they proposed to the faith and affections of all men, and in the reception of which, and in nothing short of its sincere reception, all the ends they sought by their preaching to promote, were consummated.

The objects of the Christian ministry remain unchanged, both because human nature, as the subject of moral influence, of whatsoever political modification it is susceptible, does not present itself under an aspect essentially different, and because no power exists upon earth, that could authorize a change in the purpose of the ministry. It is still then to be regarded as a *moral means*, designed for promoting, in the hearts of individuals, that faith which “cometh by hearing:” no subordinate end, no secular advantage, deserves to be associated with this, in discussing the question of its adequacy under particular circumstances, or in estimating

its success. The Christian ministry, not less in Christian than in heathen countries, is addressed to persons of two classes of character, the religious and the irreligious, in which grand distinctions merge all inferior diversities of moral and intellectual quality. If the positive opposition to the Gospel on the part of the latter class, is, in the present day, less actively malignant, less unrestrained than formerly; if it be compelled to assume more specious forms, or to content itself with the polished warfare of contempt; the negative opposition to its reception, which originates in the total absence of religious sensibility, and the practical disregard of admitted truths, is as real, and as invincible by the unaided arts of human suasion, as under the darkness of Paganism. It requires the same means that it ever did, to effect the conquest over either open profaneness, or self-complacent indifference. The knowledge of certain truths, the avowal of a speculative belief, the observance of social duties, are *not* the result in accomplishing which the design of the Christian ministry is fulfilled. That design embraces no less a thing than the total subjection of every individual subject of the moral government of God, to the obedience of faith.

Design of
Christian
worship.

The institution of Christian worship, as a social act, is likewise *a moral means*, having relation to the same end. To say that public

worship is a natural duty, is affirming more than could be predicated of any positive institution, antecedent to that appointment which gives the common character of duty to whatever is enjoined on our obedience. That it is a reasonable service, as an acknowledgement of our natural obligations to the Divine Being, and that it is subservient to the shewing forth of His declarative glory, are considerations of great importance as motives to enforce compliance with the duty; but they by no means serve specifically to describe the design and end of Christian worship, or to point out the grounds on which its observance rests. Christian worship is neither a eucharistic offering, nor a Jewish rite: it is not the service of the altar, for Christianity knows of no altar but Christ; nor of the Temple, for the only temple of Jehovah is overthrown. It is not the act of men *as men*, but it is the association of believers in the public profession of that faith which regards Jesus Christ as the object of Divine honour and affection, with a view to the maintenance and mutual excitement of this principle which forms the basis of their union. "The edification of the body of Christ," was the object which the primitive Christians were enjoined to keep in view, in "teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs;" the very acts of social

worship embraced this as their chief purpose. The gift of tongues, like other miraculous endowments of the Apostolic age, was "for a sign," or attestation of the truth of Christianity, "to them that believe not;" and one primary end of preaching, which appears to have formed, from the first institution of Christian assemblies, a principal part of the public service of the Church, was, that the unbeliever might stand convicted by his own conscience, and be compelled to own that God was indeed with that despised company.* But "edification, exhortation, and comfort," were evidently the specific objects for which the primitive Church were accustomed to assemble; nor does it appear that by the collective celebration of Christian worship, any immediate end was designed to be answered, irrespective of the moral benefit of individuals. In respect to that one simple social rite which the Redeemer instituted as the commemoration of Divine love and the most sacred pledge of Christian affection, in the perpetual observance of which the Church looks forward in the devout attitude of expectation towards the second advent of her ascended Lord, the same end is evidently comprehended in the design of the institution as a moral means: no efficiency attaches to the rite independent of the character and disposition of the worshipper. As to "positive institutions,"

* 1 Cor. xiv.
22. 5.

remarks Bishop Butler, "I suppose all those
 " which Christianity enjoins, are means to a
 " moral end; and the end must be acknow-
 " ledged more excellent than the means. Nor
 " is the observance of these institutions any re-
 " ligious obedience at all, or of any value,
 " otherwise than as it proceeds from a moral
 " principle."*

* Analogy
 of Natural
 and Revealed
 Religion,
 8vo. p. 196.

Public worship has, it is true, been one means of perpetuating the visible profession, and of extending the knowledge of the principles of Christianity; but the Holy Scriptures afford no hint that should lead us to attribute on this account, any moral value to the ceremonial performance of its spiritual rites. It is obvious that this purpose might have been sufficiently effected by other means. The case was altogether different with regard to the services of the Jewish sanctuary. By the very perpetuation of the typical rites of that prophetic economy, an important end was answered: they possessed a positive ceremonial efficacy, distinct from any spiritual benefit to which they were capable of being rendered subservient. Their moral significance was so absolutely irrespective of their conditional efficacy with regard to the individual worshipper, that it would not have been diminished, although the whole Jewish Church had been destitute of any higher religious principle than might have suf-

Contrast between the
 Christian and the
 Jewish worship.

ficed, and did to a lamentable extent suffice, to prompt a blind external obedience. When the awful tongue of Prophecy had uttered its last pathetic warning, when the Divine Oracle had ceased, when the Moral Law had long been practically annulled by the impious glosses of those who had usurped the legislative chair of Moses, the sacrifices remained in all their significance, preserved with the scrupulous nicety of ceremonial precision by those blind and formal hypocrites; till, at length, the True Glory of the second Temple appeared, the Divine Archetype of the priest, the altar, and the victim. Then, that one great mysterious sacrifice, to which the bloody offerings of a thousand years had pointed, was offered up unto God; the mystical veil was rent; those observances which had hitherto been most sacred, became thenceforth unmeaning and profane: the whole economy was abrogated at the period of its complete fulfilment, when Jesus bowed his head, and said, "IT IS FINISHED!"

Jewish and
Christian
economies
contrasted.

§ 4. The Jewish and the Christian economies, are represented by the Apostle Paul, as possessing the perfect correspondence of a shadow with the substance, of a type with the reality; but as exhibiting in all other respects the strongest contrast. The institutions of the Jewish Church were positive, and, agreeably to their design, national, local, temporary. In those of Christ-

ianity we perceive the character of universality and permanence. Scarcely any thing of a nature merely positive, is to be found in the institutes of the New Testament. The will of Christ, so far as respects his ultimate purpose in redeeming his Church, is revealed with the utmost clearness, so as to prevent, one might imagine, the possibility of mistake; but the directions are extremely few which enable us to determine or arrange the means of accomplishing his will, otherwise than by a careful reference to that design which he has made it our duty to regard as our end. How much useless controversy would an attention to this simple truth have obviated!

Every thing in the Jewish Church was typical. The visible church was distinguished by the typical worship of ceremonial observances; the priesthood was typical, and the body politic of the Jewish nation, with which the integrity of the church was identified, pre-figured the true Israel of God. The profession of religion, under a dispensation of this nature, could not be otherwise than visible and determinate, for religion was in a sense a visible thing, and the profession of it had a positive value as entering into the essence of obedience. Christianity, on account of its spiritual nature, can in no such sense be made visible, and the profession of it, disconnected with the religious

principle, is altogether worthless: it is not obedience of any kind, but an aggravation of delinquency. The Christian Church, in contrast with the political constitution, and in allusion to the ritual peculiarities of the prototype, is represented as “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people:” figurative expressions which can be referred to no external characteristics, but declaratory, in the strongest degree, of the spirituality of the Christian economy. The Levitical priesthood was symbolical, not of any political order in the Christian Church, which has no relation to any thing political, but of the Christian character which belongs to every individual of its members. It is his own body,* himself, that the Christian priest is to present a living sacrifice unto God, as a reasonable service, being enrolled one of a “kingdom of priests”† over which the true Melchizedek reigns.

* Romans,
xii. 1.

† Rev. i. 6.

Nature of
Christian
profession.

§ 5. The Christian Catholic Church, then, to correspond to this view of the nature and design of Christianity, must be considered as an institution of a purely spiritual nature, and it can be visible only in a moral sense. Considering it, therefore, as a visible company, or a collection of visible companies of believers, we proceed to inquire upon what principles the incorporation of members should be found-

ed, or what is the nature of that profession which entitles an individual to be recognised as a member of the visible church of Christ.

In a country in which the truth of Christianity is generally admitted, and its authority outwardly acknowledged, no criterion of the existence of the religious principle in an individual, could be more fallacious, than the mere profession of belief, or an intellectual assent to the doctrines of the New Testament. That profession, on the part of the individual, allowing it the whole value of sincerity, cannot, at any rate, be taken to imply more than is intended to be expressed by it; and as it is not every *kind* of belief in Christianity, that constitutes a man a true Christian, the general avowal will be significant of nothing decisive with regard to the religious character. The profession of religion, for we take it as an admitted point that the Church of Christ must be composed of persons professedly religious, involves something more than an assent to the truth of the Christian system, because that does not constitute religion. True religion is the principle of devout belief rendered visibly operative in the character; and the profession of religion must surely bear some relation to the thing professed: it must include some expression of *character*.

Of whom is the Church of Christ upon earth

composed? It is readily conceded, that by what laws soever the visible boundary of the Church be determined, the correspondence will, at the best, be very imperfect between any portion of Christian society, and that spiritual church which the outward profession faintly typifies—"the general assembly" of those whose names are written in heaven. Some terms of admission, however, into the visible church, there must be; and that more than a simple assent to Christianity was thought requisite at its first institution, is evident: "If thou believest," said Philip to the Ethiopian noble, respecting being baptized, "*with all thine heart*, thou mayest." The profession of belief on the part of the Christian convert, was in those days substantially the expression of religious character. It is nevertheless certain, that the primitive churches numbered among their members many individuals who were found destitute of the vital principle of devout faith. Our Lord himself has taught us, in the parable of the tares and the wheat, that in the present world there is no sacred enclosure which can be preserved from the intrusion of moral evil, and that the Christian communion, the immediate kingdom of Christ, must exhibit a mixed, and in some respects doubtful character, until the day which shall try the work of every man. What is true of the visible Church in general, must be true

in some degree of each particular association of believers; the purity of its communion will be at the best comparative; the tares and the wheat must grow together until the harvest.

All this must be conceded. But still, the Christian Church, in order to be in any sense visible, or to answer any moral purpose as an institution, must be circumscribed by some definite boundary, by some law of restriction. The advocates of the most catholic principles of comprehension, would hardly maintain that this boundary should be co-extensive with the national profession of Christianity, so as to include, within the pale of the church, the obvious characteristics of irreligion. Unless some peculiarity of character is to be considered as distinguishing the professed disciples of Jesus Christ, and as forming the basis of the organization of the visible fellowship of believers, we can conceive of no moral end that the outward profession of Christianity can answer. Nor should we then be able to discern any propriety in the language of the New Testament, in reference to the relative duties and spiritual privileges of the Christian body. In a church constituted on the broad principle of national profession, no selection of character, no discipline, no communion of feeling, could possibly be maintained. No general character could so pervade the heterogeneous aggregate, as that

it should form, in any degree, an exhibition of the peculiar genius and tendency of Christianity. The existence of such a society in the world, would be a fact wholly unimpressive; it would convey no instruction, communicate no influence; nay, since that which is undistinguishable is to us the same as invisible, unless some ritual or political frame-work were super-added to the circumstance of profession, the very existence of this visible church would soon become problematical. The Church and the World, as there would no longer exist between them any contrast or opposition, would soon be considered as convertible terms.

Its design.

This necessary consequence, the actual consequence in fact, of the adoption of the broad principle of comprehension as the basis of Christian communion, might be sufficient to demonstrate its fallacy. The visible profession to which the New Testament refers us, is substantially on the part of the individual, a profession of religious character; and it is designed to distinguish him from the great mass of mankind. A Christian church is a company of such "believing men," associated not only for the purposes of religious communion, but also as a "sign to them that believe not." Their religious profession detaches them from the surrounding world, imposes upon them peculiar duties, and binds them by the most solemn

obligations, to exhibit, in their collective capacity, the sublime and spiritual character of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is the very end of their being constituted "a peculiar people," that they might "shew forth the praises of Him" "who hath called them out of darkness into "his marvellous light;" that they should illustrate the nature of "pure and undefiled religion," by keeping themselves "unspotted "from the world." It was of such a company that the Redeemer of mankind said: "I have "given them thy word, and the world hath "hated them, because they are not of the "world, even as I am not of the world."

The possibility of the existence of such a society, will not be seriously contested; but there is a class of persons not altogether irreligious, who would represent the application of these principles to the subject of Christian profession in the present day, as originating in sectarian narrowness of mind, in an ignorance of the laws of society, or in Pharisaical presumption. To be in the sense we have described, *a professor*, is sufficient to excite the sneer of wounded self-love from those who are conscious that their pretensions are far below this standard. The term itself is seized as a vehicle for sarcasm, as an expressive synonyme for hypocrite; and thus transmuted, it becomes a convenient generic appellation for the whole

class of *religionists* who consider the character of the Christian discipleship as still involving nonconformity to the world.

The church
and the
world con-
sidered as
terms of
contra-dis-
tinction.

Things are sometimes aptly defined by their opposites. In reference to the visible church of Christ, the negative conveys, in a very forcible manner, one important characteristic by which it is distinguished; it is opposed to *the world*. But this very term, the world, notwithstanding its being sanctioned by the emphatic usage of the Holy Scriptures, has ever been peculiarly offensive to the irreligious; and, since it could not be decently rejected altogether, it has undergone, in common with similar expressions, that process of interpretation, which leaves it wholly unoffensive and wholly unmeaning. Some have contended that "the world" is employed in the New Testament, to designate only the Heathen; others have learnedly represented that it uniformly refers to the Jewish nation, or the old economy. Various are the methods of explaining away the force of the expressions which would seem to have a wider reference. That the term is often used in application to a state of society far exceeding in moral turpitude that which Christian countries in the present times usually exhibit, is acknowledged. Thus, when the Apostle John used that remarkable language: "We know that we are of God, and the whole

“world lieth in the wicked one,” the moral condition of even the most enlightened Gentile nations at that period, justified this strength of expression in its most literal import. But unless it can be shewn, that *the world*, in its Scriptural acceptation, as comprising all that portion of mankind which are not included in the visible church, uniformly denotes the openly profane, or professed unbelievers in the truth of Christianity, and that the sense in which the term is used, is so restricted that the great bulk of mankind can no longer, with propriety, be designated as *the world*, we must consider the authority of Scripture as decisive for applying this term of classification to all who are distinguished by the characteristics of irreligion. With respect to those who are destitute of the principle of religious faith, whatsoever semblance of moral excellence may attach to their outward conduct, it must, upon Scriptural principles, be affirmed, that “they are of *the world*.” It is not indeed for us to pronounce upon the actual state of individuals, but their visible character must refer them to the one or the other grand moral division of mankind. The church has acquired a vast nominal extension of boundary, at the expense of her internal purity: beyond that boundary, at any rate, we cannot mistake in making this application of the term; and exactly in that sense,

and to that degree, in which the church of Christ is visible, the world, in its distinguishing character of irreligion, as opposed to the church, is visible also. Nor would the phrase be deemed objectionable, but that the idea of an essential separation between the two classes, is in itself offensive to men of secular principles, whose taste and habits are in alliance with the one, while their fears lead them to seek to be identified with the other. The opposition of such persons to any distinguishing profession of religion as included in the terms of Christian discipleship, forms a strong verification of the fact we are attempting to establish. That *the professor*, to whatsoever sect he may belong, who attempts to realize this moral separation from the world, should be assailed with unkind aspersion and injurious invective, is only a fulfilment of our Lord's declaration: "The world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."

Although the sacred writers uniformly employ the phrase in question, to convey a similar idea, yet it occurs in a rather different reference. When the Apostle Paul enjoins the Roman converts "not to be conformed to the world," he must be understood as referring to the moral character of the society by which they were surrounded, and the word must be

taken in its concrete sense, as denoting a description of persons. In other places, it is used as an abstract term, in reference to the evil principles with which the Christian has to sustain perpetual conflict. "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" In this remarkable passage, there is the most distinct exposition of the essential nature of the religious principle, accompanied with an express intimation, that this belief, so far from being restricted to a speculative assent to the truth of Christianity, operates as a motive of transcendent and visible efficacy, impelling the Christian to persevere in a course irreconcilably at variance with the habits and practices of a corrupt world. The sense, therefore, and the only sense, in which the Church of Christ is visible, we maintain to be that of a distinguishing profession of religion, resting upon the basis of that peculiarity of character which affords a rational criterion of the existence of the religious principle; the purposes of that profession being no other than "the communion of saints," and the vindication of the genuine tendency of Christianity, in the sight of the world. "I believe in the holy Catholic Church."

§ 6. The Church of Christ is "one body," one by the necessity of its nature: "One Lord, one faith, one baptism."—"There are differ-

True nature
and unity of
the Catholic
Church.

“ences of administration, but the same Lord; “and there are diversities of operation, but it “is the same God who worketh all in all.” This general truth, the Unity of the true Church, has been admitted on all sides; but the utmost perplexity has seemed to attend the question, What is the nature of this unity, or in what respect does it form a distinguishing characteristic of the true church?

Unity distinguished from uniformity.

To him who considers the religion of Jesus Christ as a system of opinions, or a code of ritual observances, this unity must appear a monstrous chimera.* The aspect which the Christian world presents to him, is that of a vast empire partitioned out into so many petty independencies, nominally confederate, but actually hostile to one another, actuated by a spirit of rivalry, and incapable of unity. Should he be inclined to scepticism, he may imagine that in the supposed difficulty of determining which among so many discordant systems to embrace, he has a sufficient justification of his resting in the neutrality of disbelief; and his self-complacency may even induce him to regard this scepticism as the attribute of superior intelligence. Or should an educational bias, or natural temperament, have given a different

* “It is a great fault that men will call the several sects “of Christians by the names of several religions.”—Jeremy Taylor, *Liberty of Prophecy*, § xvi.

determination to his intellectual character, and shaped his opinions into some definite mode of belief, he will easily persuade himself that this diversity of sect and of opinion in the Church, is a scandal upon Christianity, and that, as originating in mere perversity of will, it should be corrected by the restraint of power; that it would therefore be highly advantageous to fix on some definite standard of belief, and to impose peace upon the members of the Christian communion, by a law of uniformity.

It is remarkable, that a peculiar repugnance to the diversities of religious opinion, arising from the exercise of private judgement, should have displayed itself in individuals who have otherwise manifested a singular indifference to the claims and the honour of the Christian religion. There has in fact been found no difficulty in bringing the most irreligious and most imbecile men to discern the moral beauty and necessity of uniformity in the Church of Christ, and to take an active interest in the holy attempt to reconcile the lips, the knees, and, if possible, the consciences of the Christian brotherhood, by the mild suasion of ecclesiastical authority. In the darkest ages of Christianity, when all other indications of zeal and piety were extinguished, this peculiar kind of jealousy for the honour of our holy religion, manifested itself in the utmost vigour, in the joint

labours of the prince and the prelate, to perfect the mechanism of the Church, so as that every component part should revolve, or beat, or strike in unison. Those were indeed times of uniformity, the dreary uniformity of darkness. The iron compression of power bound up the minds of men in the semblance of unity, and peace was obtained in the stillness of desolation. Meantime, that which arrogated to herself the name of the Church, intoxicated with secular power, while the grim smile of lethargy sat upon her features, still maintained, in the failure of every moral energy, an unrelaxing grasp of the forms and symbols of religion, although the glory of the temple was departed.

The Church
defined.

Scripture declares, that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; "for they are foolishness unto him: neither "can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Uniformity assuredly does not come under this description; it is not an object of spiritual perception. On the contrary, it might be sufficient to lead to the suspicion that it could have little connexion with spiritual things, that the men of this world have discovered so much solicitude to promote it. The very term, however, implies, that it is a unity of a merely external or political character: it is unity of form. How far, with regard to particular societies, an external uniformity may be

a legitimate, or a desirable object, it is not our present business to inquire. With regard to the Catholic Church, this can manifestly form no part of its essential unity;* first, because in this wide reference, the thing is in itself morally impossible, unless we subscribe to the definitions of the Romanist with respect to the visible Church; yet we know that the unity of the Church is not a thing impossible, but actual and necessary: secondly, because neither outward rites, nor forms of polity, nor human creeds, in respect of which this uniformity is required, belong to the essence of religion, or to the essential nature of the Church, as a visible religious society; but the unity of the Church enters into its very nature. For what constitutes the visible Church? "Seeing," says Hooker, "that church is a word devised to sever and distinguish that society of men which professeth the true religion from the rest which profess it not, we must define the church, which is a religious society, by such differences as do properly explain the essence of those things" whereof Religion consists, or, as he subjoins, by the object and matter of religion. "Whereupon, because the only object which separateth ours from other religions, is Jesus Christ, in whom none but the Church doth believe, and whom none but the Church doth worship, we find that accordingly the apo-

* "They be two things, unity and uniformity." Lord Bacon.

“ stles do every where distinguish hereby the
 “ church from infidels and Jews, accounting
 “ them which call upon the name of our Lord
 “ Jesus Christ, to be his Church. If we go
 “ lower, we shall but add unto this certain
 “ casual and variable accidents which are not
 “ properly of the being, but make only for the
 “ happier, and better being, of the Church of
 “ God, either indeed, or in men’s opinions and
 “ conceits. This is the error of all popish de-
 “ finitions that hitherto have been brought.
 “ They define not the Church by that which
 “ the Church essentially is, but by that wherein
 “ they imagine their own more perfect than the
 “ rest are.”

Eccl. Polity,
 B. v. § 68.

On the
 phrase, the
 visible
 Church.

The Church is a visible society: it is not,
 however, visibly one body; that is to say, its
 essential unity is not and cannot be made visi-
 ble. It is not evident in the present world,
 who constitute the Church of Christ. “ Parts
 “ thereof are some in heaven already with
 “ Christ, and the rest that are on earth, (albeit
 “ their natural persons, be visible) we do not
 “ discern under this propriety whereby they
 “ are truly and infallibly of that body.” The
 unity of a thing may be ascertained by reason,
 but its unity cannot be visible, unless the ob-
 ject itself can be viewed as a whole. This is
 the case with the Church of Christ in a moral
 sense, but in no other. The whole Church can-

Ibid. B. iii.
 § 1.

not be locally visible; it cannot be locally one. It is no less impossible that the whole Church of Christ should be politically visible; that is to say, as a whole, comprised in one political society; it cannot, therefore, be politically one. No conceivable plan of uniformity, that is consistent with Christian charity, could be co-extensive with the unity of the Church; yet if that uniformity were not total, its whole value as a supposed attribute of the visible Church, would be annihilated. Nor can we imagine for a moment, that the visible profession of the whole Christian Church, could be conformed, were it ever so desirable, to one exact standard of opinion; yet if, as respects the whole, this unity is impossible, it cannot constitute that unity which it is incumbent upon all the members of Christian societies to preserve among themselves, for there are no duties binding upon a part of the Church which are not binding upon the whole Church; no properties attaching to a part, that do not attach to the whole. The Church of Christ is, indeed, mystically one body, but it is the body of Christ, and, in that sense, like its Divine Head, invisible. It is a temple, "a holy temple, fitly framed together;" but no metaphor is adequate to express all that belongs to the nature of this spiritual edifice; for it is a temple framed of living stones, a "growing temple," the dimensions

of which cannot be taken, for the work is still going forward. It is an object which as much transcends our conception in point of magnitude and glory, as from its very nature it eludes our senses. It has no relation to time or place; it is a purely spiritual reality.

There is, indeed, a period, at which this Church of which we speak, shall become visible, when every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, shall be collected in one vast assembly, and the Universe shall form the mighty temple. "After this," says the Apocalyptical Prophet, "I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms were in their hands." Then Christ himself shall also be visible, as the Redeemer of that triumphant company; for "we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

Visibilities
had their
origin in the
Romish cor-
ruptions.

The notion of a visible Catholic Church, as a political institution, was the offspring of that monstrous system of errors, which so soon began to overspread the Church of Christ, after its alliance to secular power, and which ended in nearly extinguishing the light of Christianity. The Church of Rome dealt largely in visibili-

ties. It had a visible head, and therefore a visible unity under that head; visible altars, visible sacrifices; it made the Saviour visible; nay, it ventured so far in impiety, as to represent in the paintings which adorned its temples, the Deity himself as visible. Nor was it to the sense of sight only that it sought to accommodate spiritual realities. That which was not visible, was made palpable; prayers were consolidated into beads, grace was poured out in the form of oil or water, merit was an article of merchandize, faith was bestowed as a gratuity before reason could appreciate the gift, and the very body and blood of Christ, were substantially imparted in the Eucharist. Under pretence of enlisting the senses in the service of Faith, it converted religion itself into sensuality. Nothing could be better adapted to the prejudices of the heart, than the Romish superstition, which systematically compromised the spiritual for the sensible, connected the associations of taste with the impressions of sense, only to make those impressions the more captivating and delusive, and by combining them with false notions of religion, and with that instinctive sort of devotion, which readily attaches itself to an indefinite object, effectually excluded from the mind all appropriate ideas of the invisible realities to which pure faith and spiritual worship have reference, and chained

the immortal principle to semblances and shadows. Thus did the Church of Rome revenge the cause of the demon gods, whose lying oracles the new religion had silenced, whose very temples it had usurped, by converting Christianity itself into a system of more refined but scarcely less impious idolatry.*

Origin and
essential
character of
Idolatry.

§ 7. The essential character of the spirit of Idolatry, in which it is the natural tendency of the heart to indulge, consists in a disposition to transfer to material objects, those indefinite emotions and that moral homage, which belong to the Unseen and the Infinite. In its operation it is the very reverse of the religious principle, through which "we understand that things which are seen, were not made of things which do appear." "For the invisible things of God are to be clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead;" so that idolaters are left without excuse. If we seek for the origin of this tendency, it may perhaps be traced to that pride which leads men to make their own experience and consciousness the

* Some of the remarks in this and in two or three subsequent paragraphs, were introduced into an article which appeared some years since in a Critical Journal; but the Author conceives that he is not on that account precluded from giving them a somewhat more advantageous place in the present volume.

test of truth and the limit of their belief, refusing to acknowledge the existence of objects infinitely transcending their conception; and it may be further accounted for from the vain desire to bring within the horizon of the present, every object of hope or fear, every thing that could add value or dignity to this brief existence, or ennoble that world which man impiously claims as his possession.

To exalt, to ennoble, to deify human nature, and for this purpose to make the scene of his present existence all that might satisfy the fancy and soothe the pride of man, was the uniform design of the institutions and religious polity of classical Heathenism. The perfection of the arts aided this design, not only by presenting, as if in rivalry to the wonders of Nature, the creations of human fancy and the triumphs of human genius, but by being employed to give a definite shape to every thing abstract or imaginary, to change the intellectual into the sensible, and thus to contract or lower every idea to the level and compass of his nature. By a more daring impiety than the fabled rebellion of the Titans, Heaven was brought down to swell the pride of Greece and of Rome. Every hill and every valley had its tradition, every city, its tutelary god; every spot was consecrated in the eyes of the native. Though an Elysium and a Tartarus formed part of the

Spirit of ancient idolatry.

system of the priest and the fable of the poet; still, a future state had no place in the general feeling of the nation. Death was a joke; in their epigrams and even their epitaphs, it is referred to as a termination of hope and action. The fictions of their poets nourished and perpetuated these sentiments. The object of philosophy and the arts seemed to be alike, to localize every object of fear, of hope, or of veneration, to appropriate to every indefinite feeling some definite form, and to merge the future and the infinite in the present circumstances of man's incipient existence. "They changed the "glory of the incorruptible God into an image "made like to corruptible man, and to birds, "and four-footed beasts, and creeping things; "and worshipped and served the creature more "than the Creator, who is blessed for ever."

Positive opposition in the Jewish ritual to idolatrous rites.

§ 8. The methods which the Divine wisdom has employed, in order to counteract this depraved tendency in the heart of man, have varied, together with the character of his dispensations, in adaptation to the peculiar circumstances of mankind. One great end for which the Jewish people were selected and preserved miraculously distinct from all the nations with which they were surrounded, or through which they were dispersed, was, that they might serve as the depositary of that grand truth, which had otherwise been wholly

lost, that "Jehovah He is God," and that besides Him there is no other. For this purpose it pleased the Almighty to institute a code of positive observances, corresponding to the typical nature of the Jewish ritual, and at the same time marked by so peculiar a contrariety to the customs and prejudices of the Egyptians, and other Pagan nations, as to render an adherence to the prescribed forms of Divine worship, wholly incompatible with any admixture of idolatrous rites. Many of the apparently arbitrary ordinances of the Levitical institute, are in this view susceptible of historical illustration; they seem to have been expressly designed to perpetuate an antipathy between the Jews and the surrounding heathen, founded on a total opposition in their habits of veneration in reference to the objects of relative sanctity. By this means, a moral barrier was raised against the very entrance of idolatrous corruptions, which all their national prejudices contributed to strengthen. Yet so strong was the propensity of this gross and sensual people, to imitate, and blend with, the nations they were commissioned to extirpate, that every moral restraint was insufficient: a series of the most awful judgements, succeeded by the most signal interpositions of Divine power for their deliverance, could hardly compel, for any length of time, their external obedience to the institu-

tions of their great legislator. It was necessary, therefore, that in the ritual and circumstantial peculiarities of the Jewish worship, there should be a defined and obvious line of separation drawn between the worshippers of Jehovah and idolaters, which, when the principle of spiritual obedience was eradicated, they might still tremble to overstep. So long as they maintained a reverence for those observances, there still existed a record of the true religion in the world, and of the miraculous events which attested the supremacy of the God of Israel. The circumstance of their peculiar separation from other nations, and their relative consecration to Jehovah, connected with their preservation from idolatry, remained in undiminished force, when they themselves had lost all sense of the moral design of their separation.

This positive ritual opposition between the true religion and idolatry, extended to the circumstances of time and place. In the arbitrary sanctification of particular portions of time, and of particular cities and habitations, was testified that universality of empire which belongs to the true God; a universality both implying, and resulting from, the Unity of his Being. The imaginary deities of the heathens, were gods of the hills and gods of the valleys; they had local altars, and prescribed limits of em-

pire. The God of all the earth, vindicated his supremacy over the whole, in the act of sovereign choice, by which he selected one nation from all others, as his people, and one city of that one nation, as the abode of his manifestative presence. "I Jehovah am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine." To that "holy hill" on which stood the only temple in the world in which it was lawful to sacrifice to Jehovah, the whole nation were once a year to repair; towards that temple they were to worship, that thus the growth of local idolatry might be effectually counteracted, by a constant reference to that sacred spot in which the Divine Majesty chose to dwell.

The sabbatical institutions illustrated the sovereignty of God as the proprietor of time itself, and therefore of existence, of which time here constitutes the law, the visible measure of our finite being. They illustrated the unity of God, by demonstrating the exclusive character of the Divine prerogative; and they formed a standing memorial of those signal manifestations of Omnipotence, which attested his supremacy, as Creator, over the visible objects of idolatry, and his infinite superiority, as the Redeemer of Israel, over all created might. "The original observation of a Sabbath on every seventh day," remarks Bishop Horsley, "was

Sabbatical
Institutions.

Sermons,
Vol. II.
p. 224.

“ a public and distinguishing characteristic of
“ the worship of the Creator, who finished his
“ work in six days and rested on the seventh.
“ This was the public character by which the
“ worship of the true God was distinguish-
“ ed, that his festival returned every seventh
“ day; and by the strict observance of this or-
“ dinance, the holy patriarchs, and the Jews,
“ their descendants, made as it were a public
“ protestation once in every week against the
“ errors of idolatry.” In fact, the solemn ob-
servance of one day in seven, may be considered
as forming under every dispensation, one of the
most important out-works of religion, and as
one of the most effectual means of preserving
the profession of Christianity, no less than that
of the Jewish religion formerly, in any degree
of vigour or of purity.

Spirituality
of the
Christian
economy.

§ 9. The whole system of the Mosaic ritual
and polity, however, although of Divine origin,
was designed to have but a temporary duration,
being destined to give place to an order of
means wholly different in character from the
typical institutions of the old economy, yet hav-
ing the same end as respects the promotion of
religion and the counteraction of idolatrous
propensities in the heart of man. “ The hour
“ cometh,” said our Saviour to the woman of
Samaria, “ when ye shall neither in this moun-
“ tain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Fa-

“ther. The hour cometh, and now is, when
“the true worshippers shall worship the Fa-
“ther in Spirit and in truth; for the Father
“seeketh such to worship him. God is a
“SPIRIT.” These words clearly intimate that
an important change had taken place, not in
the Divine purpose, but in the method of his
providence; they announce that a dispensation
of a sublimer character had arisen upon the
world. National distinctions were to cease;
ritual consecrations were abrogated. Nothing
local or ceremonial formed part of the new eco-
nomy. The true worshippers, who had hereto-
fore worshipped the Father by the imperfect
medium of typical observances, were henceforth
to worship him in the simplicity of spiritual
obedience, no longer attaching sanctity to
places the most hallowed by association, nor
efficacy to any circumstances of national pri-
vilege. No sacrifice, no rite, no service, could
henceforth be acceptable to God, but such as
should correspond with the recognition of the
cardinal truth which our Lord promulgated as
the law and the basis of the new economy:
“GOD IS A SPIRIT.”

It is evident, from the Apostolic records, that
the genius of Christianity was not more hostile
to the spirit of Gentile idolatry, than it was
opposite to the prejudices of the Jewish nation.
After all the pompous array of figurative rites,

after the splendid preparations made by successive monarchs for the promised Heir of David, after a long series of inspired harbingers, who announced in the loftiest terms the transcendent glory and celestial dignity of the Desire of nations, Christ appeared, not merely "in the likeness of men," but in "the form of a servant," in the mean garb of poverty, as if to shew that the moral glory of holiness refused to blend with the gross elements of worldly pride. "He was despised and rejected of men." Even his own disciples were unable to reconcile to their anticipations of a mighty deliverer, the sufferings and ignominious death of their Master. And when at length, after his resurrection and visible ascension, the film of prejudice fell from their eyes, and they boldly declared themselves the followers of that young Galilean whom his enemies had procured to be crucified as a malefactor, throwing back the contempt of the world upon itself by triumphing in his very cross, and authoritatively proclaiming his resurrection and his deity,—even then, how slow were they to relinquish their educational prejudices as Jews! How fondly did they still linger around that temple which had once been holy, and that city which had once been glorious, and which had now become thrice endeared by sacred recollections! What a tenacity of attachment did they discover to

that ritual bondage from which the Gospel was designed to emancipate them ! And among the first converts, how obstinate was the propensity still to observe " days and months, and times " and years," in the very imbecility of superstition, and to cling to the obsolete ceremonies of the Law, till at length an Apostle was roused, in the indignant earnestness of his feelings, to declare, that " were they (with these views) " circumcised, Christ would profit them no-
" thing."

And what aspect did Christianity wear to the rest of mankind ?—a religion devoid of all external attraction, that had reference to nothing visible, that promised no temporal advantage, the very symbol of which was a type of ignominy ! Such a religion was to the sensual Jew an utter stumbling block, and to the proud Pagan foolishness. Yet, at this very period, when the Church was externally characterised by the closest resemblance to the mean condition and poverty of its Divine Founder while on earth, it reflected, with the most evident lustre, his moral glory. It was during this very state that it best answered the design of its institution, and justified, in its actual character, those lofty expressions and that bold imagery in which the sacred writers love to describe the Church of Christ. The Jew, however, blind to the true glory of the second

temple of which the voice of prophecy spake; the Ephesian glorying in the splendid fane of his great goddess; and the Roman, whose boast was of that proud structure, the Capitol, raised to "the guardian of the empire, the father of gods and men;" all met with equal hostility and contempt the simple forms and the purely spiritual worship of primitive Christianity. They viewed, with haughty derision, that novel sect, destitute of possessions and of the means of external splendour; without a temple or a priesthood,* whose very religion seemed to consist in waging war with the appearances, the captivations, and the pleasures of sense; whose belief seemed to pour contempt on worldly grandeur by asserting as its object and its founder, ONE, whose birth-place was a manger and whose end was crucifixion. How sublimely does the Apostle, as if in allusion to this very prejudice, avail himself of the associations connected with the glo-

* "Another circumstance that irritated the Romans against the Christians, was the simplicity of their worship; which resembled in nothing the sacred rites of any other people. The Christians had no sacrifices, temples, images, oracles, or sacerdotal orders; and this was sufficient to bring upon them the reproaches of an ignorant multitude, who imagined that there could be no religion without these. Thus they were looked upon as a sort of Atheists." *Mosheim's Eccl. Hist.* Vol. II. Cent. i. 1. C. v. § 7.

ry of those rival temples, to illustrate the intellectual and transcendent nature of the religion he taught! The Christian temple, built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, "Jesus Christ himself being the chief "corner-stone," was framed of living materials, of human intelligences: the building was still proceeding under the Divine Architect, and in a sense applicable to no earthly structure, it was a holy temple, the habitation of The Eternal Spirit.

§ 10. The Christian revelation has dispelled the thick darkness which overspread the most enlightened pagan nations, respecting the Object of religious worship, but it has not changed the natural tendencies of the heart. The idolatrous propensities by which the patriarchal religion, and the Mosaical institutions had so soon been corrupted, began early to exert themselves in the Christian Church; and when, after its alliance to the secular power, the extension of its nominal empire became the object of ambition to its rulers, were manifested in a studious accommodation of the external character of Christianity to those very prejudices it was designed to destroy.* As if the

*Idolatrous
corruptions
of Christi-
anity.*

* "A remarkable passage in the life of Gregory, sur-named *Thaumaturgus*, i. e. the wonder-worker, will illustrate this point in the clearest manner. 'When Gregory

worldly spirit the Church had imbibed, bore equal affinity to every moral corruption, it gradually absorbed into its institutions so large a portion of both pagan and Jewish superstition, that the truth was at length lost in the vast concretion of errors. Idolatry has reference either to the *object* or to the *mode* of religious worship. The religious honours paid by the Romish Church to imaginary orders of angelic and beatified mediators, by whatsoever subtleties of distinction those honours were made to differ in theory from adoration, necessarily degenerated in the gross minds of the illiterate into idolatry of the worst kind : these guardian or mediating angels and patron saints, became as much the ultimate objects of religious faith with the vulgar as ever Jupiter Capitolinus, or

“ ‘perceived that the ignorant multitude persisted in their
 “ ‘idolatry, on account of the pleasures and sensual gratifi-
 “ ‘cations which they enjoyed at the pagan festivals, he
 “ ‘granted them a permission to indulge themselves in the
 “ ‘like pleasures, in celebrating the memory of the holy
 “ ‘martyrs, hoping that, in process of time, they would re-
 “ ‘turn of their own accord, to a more virtuous and regular
 “ ‘course of life.’ There is no sort of doubt, that, by this
 “ ‘permission, Gregory allowed the Christians to dance, sport,
 “ ‘and feast at the tombs of the martyrs, upon their respective
 “ ‘festivals, and to do every thing which the pagans were
 “ ‘accustomed to do in their temples, during the feasts cele-
 “ ‘brated in honour of their gods.” *Mosheim*, Cent. II. 2.
 Ch. iv. § 3.

any of the hundred gods had been, in whose fanes the semblance of Christian worship was solemnized. But idolatrous corruptions of the *mode* of worship are not less at variance with the religious principle.* Whatsoever tends to compromise the spiritual for the sensible, whatsoever transfers the attention of the mind from invisible realities to material forms, directly opposes the spirit and tendency of Christianity. Through every modification of superstition, the principle of irreligion preserves its essential identity, as characterized by an absence of faith, connected with a sensual disinclination to spiritual objects. The Holy Scriptures describe this indevout disposition as natural to the human mind,—as presenting in the case of

* “ The descent of the human mind from the spirit to the letter, from what is vital and intellectual to what is ritual and external in religion, is the true source of idolatry and superstition in all the multifarious forms which they have assumed; and as if it began early to corrupt the religion of nature, or more properly speaking, of patriarchal tradition, so it soon obscured the lustre and destroyed the simplicity of the Christian institute. In proportion as genuine devotion declined, the love of pomp and ceremony increased; the few and simple rites of Christianity were extolled beyond all reasonable bounds; new ones were invented to which mysterious meanings were attached, till the religion of the New Testament became, in process of time, as insupportable a yoke as the Mosaic law.”
Hall on the Terms of Communion, p. 97.

every individual the resistance of enmity to the influence of the truth. The spirit of the world is irreconcilably hostile to the humiliating tendency and to the spiritual requirements of Christianity; and the Church can only exist by maintaining her separation from the world. All attempts, therefore, to conciliate the homage of the irreligious to Christianity, by an accommodation of its principles, its rites, or its moral requisitions, to the imagination and taste of worldly men, in whatsoever motives they may originate, must be stigmatized as frustrating the primary design of the Gospel, and as partaking of the nature of idolatrous corruptions of religion. The Church and the world must for ever remain at variance; and nothing can be more abhorrent from Christianity than all endeavours to force them into an unnatural alliance.

Essential unity of the Church of Christ, resulting from its spirituality, the basis of Christian union.

§ 11. The unity of the Church of Christ is essentially connected with the spirituality of its nature. It is a unity opposed to multiplicity, not to internal variety. By the necessity of its nature it is indivisibly One, and it ought not, as respects the duty of its members, to be otherwise than morally united. The notion of union, however, includes that of individual difference. As in physical combinations, substances of various configuration of parts, assume, in consequence of secret affinities, the

character of a homogeneous whole ; so moral union requires neither an identity nor likeness of external form, but simply the presence of predominant qualities in the character of each individual as the basis of the cohesion of sympathy. There is, however, a wide difference in the laws of physical and moral agency : the spontaneous union of individuals takes place by no necessity of operation, nor does any change in the individual character result from it, neither can it subsist any longer than the operation of the moral principle of union continues in force. Union, considered as the act of uniting, cannot be compelled : like all other moral actions, it is essentially voluntary, the production of rational motives influencing the understanding. The relations which constitute the members of Christ one body, are necessary and immutable, and they are relations far more real and more important than any in which they mutually differ. The consideration of this bond of relationship is a most cogent argument to the exercise of Christian affection ; but it cannot be made the basis of compulsory enactments ; nor is it possible that the union of Christians should be co-extensive with the unity of the Church, since it is impossible to determine in the present world, with any certainty, who actually belong to the number of true believers. A unity in which persons

are compelled to take part, cannot be the unity of *faith* on which the Church of Christ is founded. That which forms the basis of Christian union, is, a spiritual identity of nature and of character. In the following respects true Christians cannot differ :

1. As to the real existence of the religious principle, how different soever the degree of its prevalence. Faith is that principle of spiritual life, which constitutes an individual a member of the true Church of Christ.

2. As to the origin of this principle in the heart: for what diversities soever of operation may be apparent, it is "the same God who worketh all in all." The existence of religious faith can be ascribed only to one efficient cause, the Divine agency on the heart; and the results of that Divine operation must be of a uniform character.

3. As to those essential doctrines, a belief in which forms the basis of the exercise of the religious principle, as well as the appropriate evidence of its reality. "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." On this chief corner-stone "God's building" must rest. "For every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and whosoever confesseth that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in

"God." This is the foundation of faith, and the exercise of Christian charity can have no different standard. The terms of Christian communion ought, so far as possible, to be determined by the terms of salvation.

"While the truth of the Gospel remains," remarks Mr. Hall in his Treatise on the Terms of Communion, "a fundamental contradiction to it is possible, and the difficulty of determining what is so, must be exactly proportioned to the difficulty of ascertaining the import of Revelation, which he who affirms to be insurmountable, ascribes to it such an obscurity as must defeat its primary purpose. He who contends that no agreement in doctrine is essential to communion, must, if he understand himself, mean to assert either that Christianity contains no fundamental truth, or that it is not necessary that a member of a Church should be a Christian. The first of these positions sets aside the necessity of faith altogether; the last is a contradiction in terms."

It is manifest that a diversity of belief among the members of the Church of Christ, with respect to the fundamental truths of Christianity, would be altogether destructive of the very notion of its unity. "One faith, one Lord, one baptism,"—there is no other sense in which that Church is one. If we believe,

however, that religious faith is the production of the Spirit of God; we must conclude that the operations of the Holy Spirit are uniformly in accordance with His dictates ; nor is it credible that the communication of the Divine influence, necessary to constitute a man a true believer, ever stops short of producing the intelligent reception of the essential doctrines of Revelation, so long as that promise made to the Church is on record : “ He shall guide you “ into all truth.”

If, in these respects, and in these respects alone, the unity of the Church of Christ forbids the possibility of an essential difference among its members, those subordinate diversities which do not interfere with their spiritual relation to each other as constituting one body, ought not to form any bar to their recognizing each other under this character, as belonging to the visible fellowship of believers. On all points of an extrinsic or circumstantial nature, things superinduced upon Christianity, or which attach to it merely as the deductions of human opinion, the Church of Christ may be externally divided without schism, may admit of diversity without disunion. No inconvenience can result from the disagreement, so long as the disagreement or diversity is tolerated. It is the attempt to reconcile, by unhallowed means, this difference of opinion, by forcing men to agree ;

the attempt, in fact, to do that which being impossible to be done it cannot be necessary it should be done, and if not necessary, all pretence for attempting it as a thing expedient or desirable is taken away; it is the imposition of other tests of union than those which have a relation to the essential unity of the Church: it is these which are the original source of all the mischiefs charged upon diversity of religious opinion. The evil may in short be traced up to this simple circumstance—intolerance armed with power. Differences of opinion are not the cause, they are only the pretence of intolerance; but what gives venom and energy to intolerance, is ambition, and what makes ambition dangerous, is secular power. By this means inroads have been made by worldly policy into the spiritual kingdom of Christ, and the boundary of separation between the Church and the World has been, as a natural consequence, practically involved in utter obscurity. To resist this unhallowed usurpation is a duty resulting from our allegiance to the “One Lord” of the Church; and it is enforced by every consideration that respects the spiritual integrity and unity of that Church which “He hath purchased with his own blood.”

BOOK II.

ON CHURCH GOVERNMENT.

CHAP. I.

On Laws in General.

Nature of laws in general, as originating in superior will and corresponding relations.

§ 1. **IT** belongs to the constitution of created beings, to be, in all their operations, subject to fixed laws, which originate in the sovereign will of the Creator. That limitation of nature which is implied in the notion of a finite being, and which forms a boundary between distinct orders in the scale of being; that which imparts to the necessary actions, whether of inanimate or of living agents, order, uniformity, and continuance; that which guides the voluntary actions of moral agents, in reference to a final end, suitable to their nature; are so many laws originating in the appointment of God, by which term we in general imply either a physical necessity, or an obligation on the agent as a rule of action. It is the prerogative of the Divine Being, to be incapable of obligation in any sense but that which respects the perfection of his own nature, or those promises which are the very expression of his will. "The being of God," is, indeed,

to use the words of Hooker, "a kind of law
"unto his working; for the perfection which
"God is, giveth perfection to that he doeth."
That perfection implies, in conjunction with
the power of doing all things, the necessity of
doing what is best. But in respect of his na-
ture, the Divine Being is infinitely free.

Laws necessarily presuppose superior au-
thority on the part of their author, and they
are uniformly founded on corresponding rela-
tions between the legislator and the subjects of
their obligations. The laws to which all cre-
ated being is subject, have their cause in the
will of the Supreme Intelligence, the Creator
and Governor of all things. The relations
subsisting between the works of God and their
Divine Author, are those of physical and of
moral existence. The material universe, which
emanated from the will of the Almighty, is
described in the sublime language of Inspira-
tion, as yielding obedience to His commands;
as if the blind agent, Nature, were itself con-
scious of the statutes which it obeyed. Man
is, as a creature, equally subject with other
creatures, by the necessity of his nature, to
the operation of physical obligations; while
those higher relations of which as an intelligent
free agent and as a social being he is capable,
constitute the basis of other laws,—the law of
reason, the law of conscience, together with

positive laws superinduced upon these, having reference to the designs of God as the righteous Governor of the accountable beings he has formed. As the will of the Creator is the original reason of physical necessity, so the will of the moral Governor of the Universe, that will which is the expression of his perfections, is the only possible basis of moral obligation. Both have a necessary existence in the nature of things, which is only another phrase for the nature of God: only, moral obligations, being founded, not upon the simple exercise of Divine power, but upon the essential character of the Divine Being, and the necessary conditions of finite existence, are incapable of termination or of change. Positive institutions, however, notwithstanding they are of Divine origin, may, by the interposition of the same authority, undergo repeal; because, although so long as they remain in force, they are equally binding with natural duties, and rest upon the same basis,—the relation of intelligent creatures to the Divine Legislator,—they originate, not in the necessary operations of the Divine will, but in an act of sovereign appointment, prior to which there was no necessity that the creature should be made subject to such particular laws. Our essential obligations, as creatures, remain immutably the same, and these form the fundamental law of moral action. Our

positive duties spring out of these natural obligations, and relate to the variable circumstances of human existence. But in all cases, the Divine will, expressed in the constitution of nature, or made known by Revelation, is the source of moral obligation, the original cause of what is necessary, the ultimate standard of what is right.

§ 2. The relations subsisting between man and man are the basis of human laws. What imparts, however, the force of moral obligation to any human enactments, is the Divine origin of those necessary social relations on which they are founded. Obligations are either natural or voluntary; the former are necessary, and cannot originate, therefore, in the will of man; the latter rest upon those relations which originate in actual or implied compact. Laws of this nature can neither supersede nor add to natural obligation, because the will of man, in which they have their origin, is not the basis of moral duty, since it cannot make any alteration in the essential relations of accountable creatures, or control the moral nature of man. Human laws are founded on the artificial relations of society: they respect man in no other capacity than as a social being, for in this character alone man can be the superior of man. All laws presuppose a superior will,* and a superiority of this kind can attach to a human

Human laws rest on the artificial relations of man as a social being.

* BLACKSTONE, vol. I. p. 42.

being only in consequence of the artificial differences of society, the exaltation of power or rank. In a moral respect there exists a perfect equality among all men, which forbids the exercise of superior will : the conscience, therefore, or moral nature of man, cannot be the subject of human legislation.

Laws presuppose legislative right: limitation of human authority in this respect.

§ 3. All laws are founded upon relations which connect legislative right with superior will. The relations of created beings to their Maker, are such as imply a supreme right in the Divine Legislator, as well as infinite sovereignty of will. These relations are necessary and immutable, and so must be the laws which rest upon them : they respect the creature as he is, and extend to his whole being. The mutable relations upon which human government is founded, are not morally necessary ; they cannot, therefore, be the basis of moral laws which are necessary : the legislative right which originates in these relations, cannot extend to any thing beyond the social duties of individuals. And inasmuch as all duties imply correspondent rights on the part of those to whom our duties relate, and our duties to our fellow-creatures spring from their social claims, it may be affirmed, that it is only as the conduct of men is a virtual infringement of the social or political rights of others, or, in other words, tends to subvert the interests of so-

ciety, that they become amenable to human laws.

Man, considered as a moral being, cannot be under the legislative control of his fellow-man, or he would cease to be a free agent. We infer his absolute free agency, absolute as respects the authoritative interference of other creatures, as a necessary consequence of his being individually the subject of the righteous government of God. "Who art thou, O man, that judgest the servant of another?"—"God is Judge himself." In his sight all men are naturally equal, for "there is no difference." What is more, "all have sinned," and in addition to the natural equality of man, there is the consideration of the corrupt and fallen condition of his nature, to shew how utterly inadequate any human being must be to sustain a delegated authority over the conscience of his fellow-sinner. Those who have pretended to such an authority, have betrayed an awful unconsciousness of their moral impotence, and exhibited a proof of their participation in the common calamity of our nature. It is true that the constitution of society unavoidably places us under the *moral influence* of each other, and that example often acts with all the fearful efficiency of direct evil power. But power of this kind does not interfere with individual responsibility, since it offers no compulsion to the

will: our circumstances in this respect constitute, in fact, an important part of that moral exercise, which, in this state of probationary discipline, it belongs to the plan of the Divine government that our characters should undergo. Power of all kinds is to be distinguished from right: power may be usurped; right cannot be. The power of man may control our actions; human influence may bias our convictions, and contribute to the determination of our characters; but a legislative right of any sort over the souls or consciences of others, the Almighty has never delegated to a created being; nor could he delegate so awful a trust, without a surrender of his indefeasible claims as God; without putting it into the power of his creature, who would then no longer be his free subject, to appeal from the Divine jurisdiction, and excuse his disobedience by alleging,—“the man whom thou didst set over me to be “a god, he commanded me and I did it.” And as for that mortal who should be emulous of sustaining this overwhelming accumulation of responsibility, by interposing between the creature and his Maker,—what would this delegated authority be, separated from the perfections of Deity, but the right to command, without the ability to aid; the power to condemn, without the prerogative of shewing mercy! Where then were the refuge for the sinner? If

Christ were not God, though even it were possible he might "come to be our Judge," it is most certain he could not be our Saviour.

§ 4. All laws are framed with reference to an ultimate design in the breast of the legislator: they suppose not only superior will and legislative right, but power adequate to enforce that right by the sanctions of the law: the end designed must therefore lie within the compass of his power. Human legislation has in this respect also its limitation. The laws of nature imply both the right and the power of a Creator, nothing short of creative energy being competent to ensure their unvaried operative force throughout the universe of physical agency. The proper ends of human laws must correspond with the design, and fall within the scope of human government: they cannot relate to objects incapable of being accomplished by the power of man, and in respect of which the utmost sanctions of the laws of man would be unavailing. Any thing, therefore, beyond the social conduct of individuals, is in this view manifestly not a subject of cognizance by human legislation, because the moral nature of man lies wholly out of the reach of human power. It can undergo no change either for the better or for the worse, by virtue of the utmost that man can do for his fellow-man, by the mere exertion of power. What can his

Laws imply adequate sanctions and executive power: limitation of human agency in this respect.

power effect? It cannot heal the disorders of the mind; it cannot rectify the tendencies of the will; it cannot impart sensibility to the conscience, or reconquer the heart to the love of God. It is as impossible for human power to rescue a living soul from sin, as it is for human skill to save from death. Man can have over the spirit of man, no immediate, no absolute power. Were it possible in the nature of things that the administration of the moral government of this unhappy part of the universe, could be so delegated to a mortal, as that those who were committed to that inferior jurisdiction should be exempted from accountability at a higher tribunal, how many degraded beings would rejoice to surrender up the burden of their abused free agency, and welcome the heaviest doom that the stern retributive wrath of man could inflict, so that they might not have to contend with the terrors of the Almighty! Man, though a merciless judge, were a feeble avenger. As his arm is too short to save, so it is far too weak to hurl the thunders of the Almighty: he could no more punish than he could create. Vain then were all the sanctions of the Divine laws in the hands of a mortal. Man cannot be made by man to suffer, except in the outward perishable frame to which his immortal part is mysteriously allied, and in the transitory interests of this shadowy

state of being. Chains cannot for one moment fetter his thoughts, or force detain them. The conscience is wholly impassable amid the tortures which may agonize and consume the body. The flames of martyrdom form but a triumphal chariot to the rejoicing spirit. The ultimate effort of man only places his victim altogether and eternally beyond his jurisdiction, conferring enfranchisement upon that imperishable principle which He alone who created can control; which none but itself could make miserable, none but God can make happy.

§ 5. But are not moral actions, it may be objected, punishable in this world, as obnoxious to the sanctions of human laws? Certainly, all the voluntary actions of reasonable agents are moral actions; it is not, however, the moral nature of those actions, but their social tendency, or their effects on society, which renders it essential to the purpose of government to restrain or to punish the offender. Crime is a political as well as a moral evil, and it is in the former respect only that it is punishable by the laws of society. Those moral dispositions which are the very root of crime, do not, when they have only a negative operation on the character, fall under the cognizance of human legislation. Unbelief, covetousness, ingratitude, irreligion under every modification, are

Political laws relate only to political actions.

not less directly opposed to the Divine precepts and to the ends of moral government, than idolatry, murder, or fraud: yet, the former are crimes not obnoxious to the laws of man, because they are not offences against the rights of society, and because the character is not the subject of magisterial government, any more than the conscience is the subject of legislative authority: were it otherwise, it would follow, that civil government could not answer its legitimate purpose,—could not be, in fact, entitled upon valid grounds to obedience; unless the rulers of the state were possessed of moral qualifications by which, it is notorious, they are seldom pre-eminently characterized. To hold that moral discipline constitutes one end of civil government, and that nevertheless it requires in the magistrate no correspondent sense of virtue or religious principle, would be the height of absurdity. But if, as we maintain, political good is the only end of social institutions, then, political character is the only qualification requisite for the due administration of social government.

Moral actions essentially free.

§ 6. As the punitive operation of human laws, is necessarily restricted to actions violating the rights or endangering the peace of society, so it is equally manifest that their compulsory force can avail no further than to secure a compliance in the outward acts of social

conduct: it cannot produce a moral action. A moral action must be in its very nature, as proceeding from a free and therefore accountable agent, a voluntary action. Every thing in religion is of a moral nature; every thing, therefore, in order to possess the character of religion, must be uncompelled. Nothing short of an obedience purely voluntary and spiritual, can be acceptable to the great Object of religious fear, and the production of this principle in the heart is the design of Christianity. If this obedience could be produced in any other way, it would be of no value. Secular inducements may bias the mind to the side of truth, may dispose a man to believe on the strength of a less degree of evidence than would otherwise have been sufficient to satisfy the pride of his understanding; but if his belief, or his obedience, partakes of no higher character than that of an action thus involuntary as respects the understanding, or impure as respects the motive, it is not religion: the ends of the Divine government are not fulfilled in the character of that individual.

The whole of an action, morally considered, consists in the motive by which it is caused. Even human laws admit of a moral distinction in actions, a distinction founded on *obvious intention*; not, indeed, as venturing to decide upon the positive motives of the agent, but as allowing the absence of the will to negative the criminality

of the offence, by divesting the action altogether of moral character. What human laws thus partially and incidentally advert to, forms the ultimate and simple consideration in the procedure of the Divine Lawgiver. The essence of that obedience which He requires, lies in the incipient intention, the secret desire, the tendency of the will: human requisitions terminate at the act of obedience, and with that they are satisfied. Actions of this kind continually take place under the influence of the sanctions of human laws, or of selfish motives, in which the will, strictly speaking, has no part: either the free agency of the individual is suspended by physical or social restraints, and the action is involuntary, or, the intention is morally defective. The will of an agent must be according to his nature: it is impossible that a man of evil disposition should will that which is good *as* good. No motives can impel the will of the individual to act in contradiction or repugnancy to his nature, and the disposition must therefore be changed before the moral obedience of the will can be secured; that is to say, a voluntary intentional subjection to the authority of the Divine law. No human power, however, can be brought to act upon the moral nature of man; no human power, therefore, can necessitate actions of an intrinsic moral value. The operations of the will in the choice of good or evil, are capa-

ble of being influenced only through the medium of the moral disposition, and no influence of this kind can attach to legislative enactments.

§ 7. Laws, it must ever be remembered, do not in themselves partake of the nature of *inducement*; they furnish neither motives nor the power to obey: they are only rules of action. Law may be considered as a light thrown upon the path of duty. Its influence on the character is derived from the sanctions by which it is enforced:* these furnish the inducements to obedience. The ultimate sanction of human enactments, is force, and that which force cannot restrain or compel, the law of man is obviously incompetent to enact. The penalties attached to human laws respect the social interests or the social existence of man: there the utmost vindictive severities of the law must terminate. The sanctions of the Divine laws respect a future state of being; they address the fears of man through the medium of faith; they consist not of arbitrary enactments, but of consequences inevitably resulting, in the nature of things, from wilful opposition to the perfections of God and the moral order of the universe; they regard man not in any social relation, but in that only essential relation of his being which he sustains to his Maker. These circumstances form but a small part of

Contrast between Divine and human schemes of government.

See BLACKSTONE ON the Nature of Laws, vol. I. p. 57.

the contrast between Divine and human legislation. As subjects of the moral government of God, we are not merely under a dispensation of *law*, but under a remedial system of moral expedients, under an economy of grace, by which, inducements partaking of the nature of reward, though not connected with meritorious conditions, are brought to act, in combination with penal sanctions, upon the moral constitution of man. The operation of law is, to interdict, to restrain; rewards have no place in such a system, which is founded on pure justice. But the dispensation of Christ, is a dispensation of mercy. On the one hand, "the wages of sin is death;" on the other hand, "the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." To this twofold system of motives is superadded, the promise of an adequate power to those who seek for Divine aid, which shall render the subject of this wondrous scheme of moral government capable of performing his part in its requisitions, and of yielding a free and sincere obedience. What analogy, then, can be traced between the imperfect systems of human polity, and that to which as moral agents we are individually subject? What part dares man pretend to take in the administration of this infinite scheme, when all the perfections of Deity are essentially involved in its development, and the Son

of God himself assumed our nature in order to make us partakers of its benefits?

§ 8. The principles, then, of moral discipline and of social government, are altogether dissimilar. Moral obligations cannot originate with man, and cannot be enforced by the ultimate sanctions of political rule. Compulsion is wholly foreign from a system which regards men as rational and accountable agents, because outward force cannot act as a motive upon the conscience. Political rule is substantially a delegated power; it is founded on a conceded superiority, by which a certain portion of individual liberty is compromised for the general weal. But no one is at liberty to concede a superiority of a legislative nature to another in matters of religious duty, or to surrender any portion of that moral freedom which is the basis of accountability. Power in relation to conscience, cannot be delegated: the will of another cannot become our law; the usurpation is impiety. The free agency of man not only involves a sacred unalienable right which the magistrate cannot lawfully infringe, but it imposes upon every individual a duty from which there is no discharge. There may be a public will: a public conscience is a monstrous chimaera. A sense of personal responsibility lies at the foundation of all religion, and in proportion as this sense is awakened in the minds of

No individual at liberty to concede a legislative superiority to another in matters of religion.

men, they become excited to think and to act as moral beings. Whatsoever tends to weaken this consideration, by leading them blindly to confide in the proffered guidance of others, has the most baleful effect upon the intellectual character. The argument of Cicero referred to by Montesquieu, "A chief or head is sensible that the affair depends upon himself, and therefore he thinks," may be applied to every individual in the case of religious duty. In proportion as a man is sensible that the affair depends upon himself, *he thinks*.*

* "That outward force," remarks Milton, "cannot tend to the good of him who is forced in religion, is unquestionable. For in religion, whatever we do under the Gospel, we ought to be thereof persuaded without scruple; and are justified by the faith we have, not by the work we do. 'Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.'—If not by the works of God's law we are justified, how then by the injunctions of man's law? Surely force cannot work persuasion, which is faith; cannot therefore justify nor pacify the conscience; and that which justifies not in the Gospel, condemns. We read not that Christ ever exercised force but once; and that was to drive profane ones out of his temple, not to force them in. If by the Apostle we are 'beseeched as brethren, by the mercies of God, to present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is our reasonable service,' or worship, then is no man to be forced by the compulsive laws of men to present his body a dead sacrifice, and so under the Gospel most unholy and unacceptable, because it is his unreasonable service."—*Treatise of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes*. PROSE WORKS, Vol. III. p. 342.

In pursuing the inquiry into the nature of ecclesiastical jurisdiction, the preliminary question to be determined is, whether the laws of the Church, which we are about to examine, are Divine or human. If they are Divine, they must regard man simply as a religious being, and the interference of political authority is altogether excluded; if they are human, they must respect man as the subject of social obligations. The Church of Christ, in its genuine and most comprehensive signification, is not a human society; it is not susceptible of human government; its character is that of universality, and its members are attached to each other only by relations of a spiritual nature, the only Head of this Church being the Great "Shepherd and Bishop of souls." But the visible Church must necessarily consist of human societies, of which there are only two sorts; those which are natural or political, and those which are voluntary. Christian churches cannot be considered as natural societies, of which a person becomes a member by birth or heritage: (what modification they may assume, in consequence of the alliance of ecclesiastical jurisdiction to secular power, does not at present come under our consideration:) a society which originates in no natural or political necessity; which in its primitive character possesses no features of a political institution; can

The Church, as subject to human laws, must consist of voluntary societies.

be no other than a voluntary society. As such, we shall accordingly proceed to contemplate the constitution of a Christian Church, and the natural order of the inquiry will lead us to consider, first, the laws respecting the *formation* of such a society, or the terms of communion; secondly, the laws of its *constitution*, including the consideration of the sacred functions; and thirdly, the laws relating to *discipline*.

CHAP. II.

On the Law of Admission.

§ 1. **A** CHRISTIAN Church, taken in its simple primary import, is an assembly of the professed disciples of Christ. Before the organization of Christian societies, while "all that believed were" as yet "together," "continuing with one accord daily in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house," the collective body of the disciples are spoken of under this designation, as "the Church." At first, they constituted, strictly speaking, an assembly, meeting "with one accord in one place;" but when "the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly," three thousand converts being added in one day, and a great company of the priests having become obedient to the faith, one room would be insufficient to contain the assembly, and unity of place would soon cease to be included in the term. For some time, it is certain that they continued to assemble together in large companies in the Temple, for the purpose, pro-

Primary import of the term Church.

bably, of collectively testifying before the Jews, the truth of the Apostles' doctrine; but many of their religious meetings, especially when they became as Christians the objects of persecution, must have been held privately and in small companies, at the houses of some of the brotherhood. When Peter was delivered from prison, "he came to the house of Mary the "mother of John, where many were gathered "together, praying." Still the Church constituted one society, but, as disciples multiplied in other parts, they began to form distinct bodies, to which the term churches was applied, in the sense of Christian societies, although the use of the word continued to be retained as comprehensive of the unity of the whole Christian brotherhood throughout the world.

Origin of
Christian
assemblies.

§ 2. The Apostolic writers, however, having no regard to any etymological niceties, appear not to have scrupled employing this term in reference to any collective assembly of Christians. The Church that was at such a place, or in such a house, would seem in many instances to intend nothing more than the company of disciples residing or accustomed to assemble there. Thus, we read of the Church that was in the house of Priscilla and Aquila, of the Church in the house of Philemon, and, at a very early period, of "Churches "throughout Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria."

The disciples met together, for the purpose of social prayer and the breaking of bread; more particularly on the first day of the week, to celebrate the resurrection of the Saviour; not, so far as appears, in consequence of any Apostolic mandate, but under the influence of common principles and the strong identifying bond of Christian affection. No positive law had been issued by our Lord, directing the formation and organization of such societies; but they had a promise which carried with it the virtue of a law, in that declaration of our Saviour: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them;" and there, doubtless, was the reality of a Christian Church.* The government of the Churches was at first wholly vested in the Apostles, who continued for the most part to reside at Jerusalem long after the Church itself was scattered by the persecution that arose about Stephen, throughout the neighbouring regions. The institution of an order of officers to superintend the equitable distribution of the Church funds among the poorer brethren, an order to which the title of deacons or ministers became subsequently appropriated,—was the first step, according to the records of the Apostolic history, in framing what may be

* *Ubi tres, ecclesia est, licet laici.* TERTULLIAN. Exhort. ad Castit.

termed the constitution of Christian churches. This measure originated purely in expediency, being primarily designed to relieve the Apostles of a most laborious, and in some respects irksome business, and to enable them to give themselves without interruption "to prayer, "and to the ministry of the word." It was not till some time after societies of Christians had been collected in various parts by means of the preaching of the Gospel, that "elders" were, after the manner of the synagogue, "ordained "in every city," who at length, when the government of the churches assumed a more settled and definite character, came to be distinguished, as the rulers of the congregation, by the appellation of bishops. The Apostles themselves could not possibly exercise a personal superintendence in the formation and internal management of the various churches which were so soon formed in all the countries into which the converted Jews of the dispersion carried the tidings of the Gospel. The Christian doctrine was first promulgated at Antioch by disciples, "natives of Cyprus and Cyrene," who, contrary to the practice of the Church at Jerusalem at that period, and without any special instruction, as it should seem, from the Apostles, who during the persecution remained there, preached Christ to the Grecians in that city. Barnabas, in consequence of the tidings which

reached Jerusalem, was accordingly deputed to visit Antioch, where he found a numerous Church already existing; in which "certain prophets and teachers," four of whom are mentioned by name without any distinction of rank, "ministered to the Lord," and sustained the presidency. From this very Church, in which it is obvious no Apostle had ever presided, Barnabas, and Saul, the great Apostle of the Gentiles himself, were sent out, under the immediate direction of the Holy Spirit, on a special mission, to which, according to the Jewish custom, they were ordained by the other elders. In the Church of Corinth there were a number of prophets and teachers endowed with miraculous gifts, which involved the discharge of correspondent functions; but there appears to have existed in the society, neither peculiarity of office, nor distinct government, nor, indeed, any fixed regulations for their proceedings, prior to the injunctions received from the Apostle Paul, to speak in course, and to observe a decent order. Had any form of ecclesiastical government been at this period common to the churches, the necessity could not so soon have arisen for Apostolic interference; or, if it had, St. Paul would doubtless have adverted to their departure from the primitive model, and enjoined a subordination to the authority of their presiding pastor, as the most natural expedient

for preserving that decorum which was violated by the ebullitions of their zeal.

Independ-
ence of pri-
mitive
Churches.

Although these societies originated in voluntary association, their formation nevertheless took place as the result of a conviction of religious duty. The outward profession of Christianity was required of every believer, on the ground of the most solemn obligations, and this involved both a separation from the surrounding world, and the taking part in every social duty, and in the fellowship of suffering, with the Church of Christ. Throughout the Christian societies, the moral authority of the Apostles as the inspired prophets of Jesus Christ, his companions during the days of his flesh, and the witnesses of his sufferings, claimed to be recognised on every point included in their Divine commission. No Christian church could, in respect to their authority, aspire to independent rights, on the ground of being a voluntary association, without a dereliction of the very principles of Christianity, without disregarding the moral evidence which attested the truth of the Gospel. No such contempt of Apostolic authority is chargeable on the primitive churches: on the contrary, there was a general disposition to defer in all respects to their directions; and in the first ages of the Church, the societies in which an Apostle or the companion of an Apostle had presided,

were looked upon as claiming a sort of pre-eminent dignity. The Apostles, however, were studiously careful to lay upon the Churches no greater burden than those restraints* which were morally necessary, and those obligations† which were consonant both with kindness and equity. They combated in every form the spirit of imposition, exhorting the disciples to stand fast in the liberty with which Christ had made them free, and not to be again entangled with the yoke of bondage. St. Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, evinces a remarkable solicitude to avoid the stern language of authority; while he reproves them for their ignominious and servile subjection to those false teachers who had usurped a lordly pre-eminence over them, he explains to them that he does not wish that they should be burdened, and other churches eased by their contributions: "And herein," he writes, "I give my *advice*." Even with regard to those rights which were not peculiar to the Apostles, the claims which he participated in common with other ministers, he magnanimously refused to avail himself of them: "Nevertheless we have not used this power, lest we should hinder the Gospel of Christ." If, then, the independence of Christian Societies was thus respected even by the Apostles themselves, we may be confident that it could not be legitimately subject

* Acts xv.

28.

† Gal. ii. 10.

to other restrictions. No authority, save theirs, could extend to societies formed by the voluntary concurrence of the individuals of which they were composed, for purposes of a purely religious nature. Free, therefore, from all foreign control, they must have been constitutionally independent, although morally united and spiritually one Church.

First condition of initiation, the voluntary act of the candidate.

§ 3. Such being the origin and primitive character of Christian societies, as voluntary congregations of believers, the terms of initiation, in order to be consonant with the essential nature of a Church of Christ, must comprise, in the first instance, the voluntary act of the candidate for admission. Compulsion, it has been already shewn, is destructive of the moral character of any action, much more of actions purely religious, which have absolutely no meaning except so far as they are the expression of internal dispositions. If it is the duty of Christians to unite themselves to the Church of Christ, it is their duty to be willing to do this; the will is the essence of the duty; but the will cannot be compelled. To make an outward profession of the religion of Jesus, is, in every age, and under all circumstances, not less than in the Apostolic days, the bounden duty of his disciples; but this implies the antecedent obligation to embrace that which is to be thus professed: profession dissociated from sincere belief, is no

better than hypocrisy. Compulsion cannot in fact be exercised by the Church, inasmuch as no society can exercise legislative jurisdiction beyond itself: all that it can do is, to offer inducements, to exhibit advantages that may operate as rational motives upon those without the pale of its authority. The consideration of duty is one of the strongest inducements that can be offered to a virtuous mind, and to this, with respect to uniting with a Christian society in religious communion, is added that of the privileges which it involves; but these considerations derive their appropriateness from the moral nature and free agency of the individual to whom they are addressed. Farther, the nature both of the duties and privileges connected with Christian communion, renders it necessary that he should freely and spontaneously join himself to the Christian society: otherwise, he would not only fail of deriving any personal benefit, but form a positive obstruction to the circulation of the vital principle of union.

The second condition essential to the character of a voluntary association, is, that it shall not be compelled to receive any person contrary to the general will. A compulsory law of this nature originating *within itself*, would be self-destructive, or rather, a contradiction in terms; and were it imposed by foreign authority, it

Second condition, absence of compulsory obligation on the Church.

would no longer possess the character of a voluntary union. The right of admission, and the power of exclusion, must be inherent in every free society; but in a religious association, formed for the purpose of Christian communion, the act of admission on the part of the society, partakes of a moral character; it is an act of religious duty, and viewed in this light, it must be a voluntary transaction. Societies are, not less than individuals, morally responsible for the exercise of their rights, and Christian Churches lie, most certainly, under peculiar obligations and restraints in respect to the admission and exclusion of persons claiming the privileges of communion; but they cannot be subject to any imposed necessity in this particular, without losing altogether their voluntary, and in that their moral character.

Third condition, that exclusion is no infringement of social rights.

A third condition implied in the very nature of a Christian Church considered as a voluntary society, is, that since it originates in moral considerations unconnected with either natural or civil relations, the exclusion of any individual is no infringement of his social rights: that, even allowing it to be, in certain possible cases, an act of moral injustice, it is not a political wrong. A voluntary society must be one to which no individual has either a natural claim to belong, or is under any natural or political obligation to attach himself. A Christ-

ian Church differs indeed in one material respect from every other voluntary society, in that its laws do not originate with itself, nor are its proceedings simply optional. The will of Christ is the law and basis of its formation; and its members lie under the strongest obligations to conform in every respect to the directions of his inspired servants, as the only rule and authority upon which they are at liberty to act. But its correspondence with the notion of a voluntary society, holds good in this respect; it has no relation to any political interests whatsoever. In the primitive ages of the Church, to become a member of the Christian community was esteemed by the powers that then were, a breach of political duty, and involved the sacrifice of every secular interest. It was in fact an act of total separation from the world, a renunciation of its manners and pursuits, which brought down upon the resolute adherent to the Christian faith, contumely and persecution. Political changes in the external circumstances of the Church of Christ, can surely make no alteration in either the claims or the obligations of men, to become its professed members. Those who would not have claimed admission into the Christian society, in defiance of the interdictions of the civil power, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, and to bear the reproach of Christ, can

have no valid claim to be received at a time when the profession of Christianity has become safe and even reputable. No new obligation results from the prosperity of the Christian cause, nor from the circumstance of its being patronised by the civil ruler, which makes it more a man's duty now, as a member of society, to embrace a profession with which he would then have trembled at being identified. Christianity itself has undergone no modification in consequence of its assuming, in the estimation of the world, a more polite and social aspect. The person who should yield obedience now to any of its requirements, merely because they are sanctioned by political authority, would be acting from a motive that as much negatives the religious character of his compliance, as though it were the result of compulsion. He is as really giving the preference to the authority of man, as if, under circumstances which placed its claims in direct competition with those of the Divine authority, he carried out the principle to its extreme tendency, and rejected Christianity at the command of Cæsar. Let it be proved to be a man's civil duty to enroll himself a member of a Christian society, and it must be granted at the same time that it is his civil right; for it cannot be his duty to perform what he has no right to the means of performing. That very enactment, therefore,

which renders it obligatory on any one to join a Christian church, annuls the power of exclusion on the part of its members, and thus at once destroys the voluntary character of the association. But though this consequence does in fact attach to all ecclesiastical incorporations which rest upon the basis of political authority, the Christian fellowship, as it existed in the primitive churches, was established upon opposite principles. No individual could claim to be received into their communion, but on the ground of religious character, or the visible evidence of his belief; and if excluded, he suffered no injury; he was done no wrong: nor can voluntary societies equitably subsist on other conditions.

The purpose for which a society is formed, imposes a necessary restriction upon its reception of members, by rendering some qualification in reference to that purpose a pre-requisite to admission. This is a fourth essential condition of the voluntary association of Christians. The purpose for which Christian churches were instituted, is purely spiritual, and cannot be fulfilled except so far as there prevails in the characters of their respective members, a moral correspondence with the design and object of their formation. To the evidences of this correspondence, the principle of selection must exclusively relate: in other words, to those

Fourth condition, suitable qualifications in the candidate, corresponding with the design of the association.

dispositions and characteristics by which men, whose social claims are equal, are, as religious beings, essentially distinguishable. The necessity of certain moral pre-requisites to initiation, is recognised even in those ecclesiastical incorporations in which the principles of selection and voluntary association are abandoned. Faith and repentance are exacted from the infant at the font, previous to his ceremonial initiation into the national Church; and although these conditions are strangely supposed to be discharged by proxy, and the qualifications exist only in the hypothesis of future performance, still, it is manifest that the original notion of a Christian Church, as a congregation of believers, is to be traced in the corrupt institutes of a secular establishment. It may perhaps be contended, that faith and repentance are indeed the moral conditions of becoming a member of the true and spiritual Church of Christ; but that simply the profession of belief is requisite to entitle the candidate to be received into a Christian Society, as part of the visible church upon earth. In what light then are we to contemplate admission into the visible church,—as a civil, or as a religious transaction? If it be only a political society into which the profession of faith constitutes a term of introduction, the condition may well enough be performed by a legal fiction; and the profession

of a proxy may, if the civil authorities be pleased so to determine it, be valid: only, it may reasonably be inquired, what faith and repentance should have to do with an individual's qualifications for admission into a political community, or why any qualifications should be required that may so easily be dispensed with, by means of a legal fiction. But if, on the contrary, the view we have taken of what constitutes a Christian Church, be correct, if it be a voluntary association of believers for purposes purely spiritual, admission cannot be considered as either a civil or a ceremonial transaction; and the terms of communion, therefore, must respect the religious character. The profession of religious belief is, in truth, as much a moral action, as faith itself: it must be so, considered as a duty, and it consequently lies wholly out of the province of compulsion. A profession that is not spontaneous and voluntary, is justly liable to suspicion; but should it obviously originate in impure motives, so far from its being the discharge of a religious duty, or its forming a personal qualification for admission into a Christian society, it would be absolutely fatal to the pretensions of the individual, by bringing in question his moral character. How fearful, then, must be the amount of guilt entailed by the irreligious attempt to force indiscriminately upon all descriptions of

persons, the profession of what there is every reason, in the majority of cases, to believe they do not actually possess. Yet, if a man's civil rights and privileges are suspended on his outward profession of religious belief, what is this but to hold out the strongest inducements to either a thoughtless or a deliberate hypocrisy? This is indeed doing evil that good may come; but evil in the hands of man can bring forth only evil. To require all men to make a profession of Christian belief, and to enforce that requisition by penal sanctions or secular inducements, is to take away all that is distinguishing in that profession as an expression of character; to confound together those two grand moral classes into which mankind are divided, as believers and unbelievers; and to destroy the only basis upon which religious communion, as a practical reality, can be established.

It is of the more importance to place in a clear point of view, the primitive character of Christian assemblies as voluntary societies, because upon this point hinges the whole controversy respecting ecclesiastical polity. The terms of communion in Christian Churches, their constitutional form, and the nature of discipline, would be with far less difficulty adjusted, were these first principles of religious union admitted as furnishing a key to the inquiry.

§ 4. The first Christian communities were far from being held together by the mere tie of voluntary association. Religious union includes the idea of mutual affection, the genuine result of those common views and principles which are peculiar to the Christian character. One design of the institution of the Lord's supper, was, to cement this mutual attachment, to constitute a pledge and expression of Christian fraternity; while, as a solemn memorial of the transcendent love of Him who loved them so as to give his life for them, it presented the strongest conceivable motive to the exercise of that love which he enjoined upon his followers. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another." In the conduct of the early Christians, this characteristic was distinctly recognised. "Behold," it was said, "how these Christians love one another!" This love to the brotherhood "for whom Christ died," was not an ideal bond, or a mere sentiment; it formed the very life and essence of religious communion, infusing itself into every social rite. It was indispensable, therefore, that he whom they received into their society, should not merely profess his assent to the truth of Christianity, but exhibit some correspondence of character, in order to his being received with confidence and affection as a Christian brother.

Nature of religious fellowship as displayed in the first Christian assemblies.

In the absence of secular motives, especially during seasons of persecution, the probability would be extremely small that any individual, destitute of the religious principle, should, unless under the influence of self-deception, seek to join himself to the Christian society. The very profession of belief, under those circumstances, formed a presumptive evidence of sincerity. The Apostolic history presents to us, it is true, some lamentable exceptions; but the signal and miraculous judgements by which these were attended, marked at once the criminality and the danger of an insincere profession of Christianity. The consequence was, that "great fear came upon all the Church, and upon as many as heard these things." The tenor of the Apostolic exhortations, necessarily implies that the societies to which they were addressed, were persons whose collective character at once distinguished them from other men, and bound them, in accordance and sympathy, to one another. For them to "walk

1 Cor. iii. 3. "as (other) men," is represented as inconsistent with their spiritual character. The duties which devolved upon them, as members of the Christian brotherhood, were altogether peculiar, and pre-supposed a radical change to have been superinduced upon the character of every individual upon whom they were enjoined. The preaching of the Gospel was the

instituted means of effecting this change, and the formation of Christian Churches uniformly took place as the consequence of its success. To collect together a Church under some form of government, and then to attempt the conversion of the individuals of whom it was composed, was not the practice of the Apostles: but “they that gladly received the word, were “baptized,”* and thus “believers were added “to the Lord.”† Religious character was the indispensable, and it may be as truly affirmed, the sole pre-requisite to Christian communion.

* Acts ii. 41

† Ibid v. 14.

Who then can be authorized to introduce any change in the essential laws and constitution of the churches of Christ? to institute other terms of communion, or to dispense with these qualifications, by compulsory statutes, which supersede and preclude all selection founded on discrimination of character? Why should it be deemed unlawful for Christian men to associate together on the very same principles as those on which the primitive churches were established, to employ the very same means in order to their formation that the Apostles employed—the preaching of the word, and to attempt to realize those spiritual objects which they had exclusively in view? Of this alone are Nonconformists guilty, in declining submission to the claims of Ecclesiastical establishments.

On terms of
communion,
as a means
of ascertain-
ing qualifi-
cation.

§5. But, it may be said, admitting that the qualifications for Christian communion have undergone no alteration, the terms of communion, considered as a means of ascertaining the reality of those qualifications, may admit of being circumstantially modified, in order to meet the varied aspect of society. It must be granted, then, that a religious community have a right to be satisfied as to the fact of the religious character of the individual candidate, and they must be allowed to decide upon the requisite evidence. So long as the terms of communion maintain an ultimate reference to religious sincerity, as the only object of their restrictive operation, they can be considered as illegitimate only so far as they can be proved inefficient, unnecessary, or unjust: their propriety must in fact be determined by their expediency.

Articles and
Creeds.

Articles and Confessions of faith are among the most ancient tests of character, that have been introduced with a view to preserve the purity and unity of Christian Churches; and so long as they constituted the terms of a voluntary union, they possessed a degree of positive efficiency. The connexion between belief in the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, and the existence of the religious principle, being attested by experience, it was instituting a legitimate criterion of character, to require the explicit assent of every individual to a declara-

tion of what the Church held, with one accord, as essential truths. It might also be deemed the most likely method of preventing differences of opinion among its members, to put forth a specific statement of the doctrines respecting which it was judged necessary to secure an entire accord. It is true that, even in voluntary societies, the utility of creeds, viewed as tests of character, is extremely limited, and if they are substituted for other means of determining the religious qualifications of the individual, they will frequently prove fallacious; since they can operate as a restriction only with persons of integrity. But when Subscription to articles of faith is enforced by civil authority, their inexpediency becomes aggravated to the height of absurdity; their original design, as tests of character, is wholly frustrated; they are then tests of nothing but political obedience—of obedience in that one sole respect in which it is wholly unauthorized by Christianity; and the imposition becomes as useless as it is illegitimate. The articles thus enforced, may be unobjectionable, or even highly valuable, as a summary of Christian doctrine, but they serve no purpose as a declaration of belief on the part of those who subscribe them, for the essence of profession is destroyed when profession is no longer free. It is, indeed, matter of historical notoriety, that the faith of political so-

cieties, has very rarely corresponded with their formularies.*

Legitimate
design of re-
ligious tests.

We must distinguish between the use of creeds, and the imposition of creeds.† The former may be inexpedient, the latter only is unjust. The opposition to creeds has, no doubt, in some instances, originated in a disbelief of the truths which they contained; sometimes in a rather fastidious disapprobation of the expressions in which those truths were embodied; or in a secret wish that the points should be surrendered as unimportant, respecting which there existed in the mind only a half-persuasion that they were true. There is an indecision,—an intellectual cowardice, which sometimes keeps men halting and wavering all their lives about the most evident propositions of Scriptural truth, while they take to themselves the credit



* “Composed under the influence of secular authority, they may serve to ascertain the faith of the court, or of the convocation which composed them, but they are not the faith of those who were never consulted about the business. They possibly may contain the faith of these societies, but they do not ascertain the fact.”—GRAHAME’S “Review of Ecclesiastical Establishments.”

† “Creeds in themselves, so far from being an invasion on the rights of mankind, are the necessary exertions of these very rights. All free societies have a right to use their own understandings in choosing what they shall believe and profess. Were they precluded the right of taking care that their public teachers and members be of one and the same faith, in order to answer the purpose of communion, they would cease to be free.” *Ibid.* p.

of peculiar candour and discernment: they are afraid to believe; they dare not disbelieve. No individual could reasonably hesitate to satisfy the society he claimed the privilege of joining, as to the accordance of his religious sentiments with their views of the doctrines of Christianity; and were he required to subscribe to the written expression of his own sentiments, his refusal to comply with that formality would wear the appearance either of prevarication or of perverseness. It is exactly the same thing if, with a view simply to ascertain *the fact* of his belief, not to dictate laws to his conscience, a declaration previously drawn up by the community, is presented for his voluntary signature of assent. The Church has a right to demand the explicit avowal of his faith, as part of that confession before men which is required of every disciple of Christ; and it has a right to appoint the manner in which this avowal shall be made, as a term of admission, because no natural claim can be pleaded against exclusion, and no civil privileges are suspended on compliance. What is required in this case of the individual, is, not that he shall believe what the Church believes, for this duty rests upon far other grounds than human authority, and no one has it in his power to believe at the requisition of another;—but that he shall openly express that belief which, from his voluntary application to

be received into that Christian society, it is presumed that he already possesses.

Articles of faith may, as embodying the dictates of Divine truth, lay claim to an intrinsic *moral authority*; but this authority is of a species wholly distinct from human legislative power, and is not susceptible of human sanctions. The moral authority of articles and creeds, is derived purely from the Scriptures, to the claims of which on the human heart they cannot possibly add any thing, since those claims rest upon the character of God, and the evidences of Revelation. Articles of faith do not partake of the nature of evidence, and therefore they make no alteration in the circumstances of duty; for were all the world to require us to believe a proposition contrary to the Scriptures, our compliance would be impiety; and what God commands us to believe, the authority of all the Churches upon earth, cannot render a whit more our duty to believe, or more impious to reject. Nothing but additional evidence can increase the force of our obligations to receive the truth; and human authority is not evidence.

Creeds incapable of being enforced by law.

Articles of faith, whatever moral claims to our assent they may derive from their conformity to Scripture, do not admit of being authoritatively imposed as a law of belief: they are serviceable only as they constitute the ex-

pression of religious sentiments. Belief does not take place in the mind as the consequence of any law: were that the case, all men would believe, for the Divine law which commands them to believe, is binding upon all men: but if Divine laws are not adapted to produce this effect, how absurd were the idea that belief should be in any way the result of human legislation? Yet, articles of faith connected with penal sanctions, not only involve this monstrous supposition, but include three others equally false. They suppose, first, that man is accountable to man, for his religious actions; secondly, that those religious actions can be compelled; and thirdly, that a compulsive authority is vested in the Church for this purpose: whereas, nothing is more certain than that belief, when it deserves the name of a religious action, is the result of principles in the heart, which no human agency can of itself originate.

Men, as religious beings, or beings capable of religion, are not to be viewed in the mere capacity of subjects of the legislative government of God: they are under a peculiar moral dispensation, as being placed in a state of probation, liable to temptation, and compassed with difficulties; one design of which, it is evident from the whole plan of Divine Providence, is the manifestation of their individual characters. It constitutes part of this probation, that the

On belief, as connected with the development of character.

evidence of religion, as well as the moral evidence by which mankind are called to determine many of their ordinary actions, is not so obvious, or of so high a degree, as to leave no scope for the moral exercise of the understanding in accepting or in rejecting it. "That religion is not intuitively true," remarks Bishop Butler, "but a matter of deduction and inference; that a conviction of its truth is not forced upon every one, but left to be, by some, collected with heedful attention to premises; this as much constitutes religious probation, as much affords sphere, scope, opportunity, for right or wrong behaviour, as any thing whatever does. And their manner of treating this subject when laid before them, shews what is in their heart, and is an exercise of it." "In the great variety of religious situations," he adds, "in which men are placed, what constitutes, what chiefly and peculiarly constitutes, the probation, in all senses, of some persons, may be the difficulties in which the evidence of religion is involved; and their principal and distinguished trial may be, how they will behave under and with respect to these difficulties." The Bishop adverts to the sceptical objection against Revelation, founded on the supposed deficiency in its proof, and represents the objector as arguing, that, "were a prince to send directions to a servant,

" he would take care that they should always
 " bear the certain marks whom they came from,
 " and that their sense should be always plain,
 " so that no doubt should exist as to the au-
 " thority or the meaning of them." The full
 answer to this objection, he remarks, " lies
 " *in the very nature of religion*. The reason
 " why a prince would give his directions in this
 " plain manner, is, that he absolutely desires
 " such an external action should be done, with-
 " out concerning himself with the motive and
 " principle upon which it is done: *i. e.* he re-
 " gards only the external event, or the thing's
 " being done, and not at all, properly speaking,
 " the doing of it, or the action. Whereas the
 " whole of morality and religion, consisting
 " merely in action itself, there is no sort of
 " parallel between the cases."*

Nothing can betray greater ignorance of the
 nature of religion, than the notion, that the mere
 sentiment of belief is of any moral value, so
 that the production of it in the heart by an act
 of human authority, should, were it possible,
 be a service acceptable to God. Is it not ma-
 nifest, that under circumstances which should
 render belief unavoidable, by removing the pos-
 sibility of doubt, there would be no room for

* BUTLER'S (Bp.) "Analogy of Natural and Revealed
 "Religion." 8vo. pp. 278, 291.

the manifestation of individual character? Will not death place us in such a state of certainty? And of what value will belief be then? Will it be then an act of obedience in the unhappy outcasts of Heaven, that they believe? But in a state of probationary discipline, faith is an expression of character: it is not forced upon the mind by an outward necessity, but is the result of a religious exercise of the dispositions of the heart; and it is this exercise of religious obedience in believing the testimony of God, not believing considered in itself, that constitutes our duty our "reasonable service, acceptable to God."—Creeds, then, and Articles of faith, since they do not partake of the nature of evidence, since they are not susceptible of the authority of law, have no properties calculated to produce religion in the mind, and their being assented to, is a circumstance of no moral consideration, unless it be the result of a voluntary religious act on the part of the individual.

The legitimate design of declarations of religious belief, is, to ascertain, not to produce accordance of opinion, by presenting a standing record of that faith which is the basis of religious union. But accordance of opinion is no further necessary than as it relates to those points, a belief in which is essential to, the Christian character: articles and symbols, therefore, which aim at securing uniformity on non-essen-

tials, are justly condemned. If they comprise propositions which a religious man may safely disbelieve, they infallibly lead to that worst species of schism in the Christian Church—a separation among good men. Subscription, in that case, ceases to deserve being termed a confession of faith; it is no longer an expression of character, or an act of religious obedience; it is a mere intellectual deference to human opinion. Human opinion is possessed of no intrinsic authority: hence has arisen the supposed political necessity of arming it with power.

§ 6. The most ancient symbols of faith are, of course, the most simple: they were designed only to separate the believer from the unbeliever, and to hold forth to the infidel world that faith in which all the disciples of Christ were of one heart and of one mind. That brief summary of the principal doctrines of Christianity, known under the name of the Apostles' Creed, has, indeed, no pretensions to be considered as the production of the Apostolic age; but some of the articles of which it consists, were certainly derived from the very days of the Apostles, being found in all the ancient creeds.* The creed itself was not all composed at once, but, as Mosheim states, “from small beginnings, “has imperceptibly augmented in proportion

THE APO-
STLES'
CREED.

* See LORD KING's *Critical History of the Apostles' Creed*. London, 1702. Page 24, et seq.

“ to the growth of heresy, and according to the
 “ exigencies and circumstances of the Church,
 “ from which it was designed to banish the
 “ errors that daily arose.”* Its origin may
 clearly be traced to the brief and simple confession of faith demanded of the Christian convert previously to his being baptized; such as was conveyed in the declaration of the Ethiopian nobleman to Philip: “ I believe that Jesus
 “ Christ is the Son of God.” This was the purpose which the Creed itself was primarily

* See MOSHEIM's Eccl. History, Vol. 1. P. 116—“ As for
 “ the other articles of the Creed, viz. Such as are predicated of
 “ Christ, as, *His being conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the*
 “ *Virgin Mary, &c.* and those other two, *The Holy Catholic*
 “ *Church*, and, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, I conceive them to
 “ be introduced in opposition to heresies, as they sprung up
 “ in the Church: as, *Was conceived by the Holy Ghost*, in
 “ opposition to the Carpocratians, Ebionites, and Cerin-
 “ thians, who taught, that Christ was born in the ordinary
 “ and common way as other men and women are: *Was born*
 “ *of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, &c.* in
 “ contradiction to the Docetæ, Simonians, and others, who af-
 “ firmed Christ to be a man, not really, but only phantastically,
 “ or in appearance: *The Remission of Sins*, against the Basi-
 “ lidians, who held, that not all sins, but only involuntary
 “ ones would be remitted; or rather against the Novatians,
 “ who denied remission to the lapsed: *The Holy Catholic*
 “ *Church*, to exclude thereby all hereticks and schismatics
 “ from being within the pale thereof. *The Communion of*
 “ *Saints* was brought in last of all.” LORD KING'S Enquiry
 into the Constitution, &c. of the Primitive Church. Second
 Part. ch. iii. p. 66,

designed to answer;* for, indeed, we cannot imagine that the members of a primitive church should need have had the few elementary propositions of which it consists, mechanically enforced upon their memories by a reiterated formal confession of believing in them. Christian Churches were not, in the first age at least, composed of nominal converts, strangers to the first principles of religion.

Even this Creed, however, is not, as respects some of the later interpolations, unexceptionable. The proposition, *He descended into hell; descendit ad inferos*, bears the mark of a parenthetical origin, and is clearly referrible to the traditions of men. Bishop Pearson has shewn† that it is in none of the ancient rules of faith, either Roman or Oriental. It was first used in the Church of Aquileia, towards the latter end

* "Cyprian writes, that at baptism, they asked the baptized person's assent to this Creed, *Whether he believed in God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Remission of Sins, and Eternal Life through the Church?* And that at baptism they asked, *Dost thou believe the Life everlasting and Remission of Sins through the Holy Church?* These articles of faith, to which the baptized persons gave their assent, are called by Cyprian, *The Law of the Symbol*; and by Novatian, *The Rule of Truth.*" LORD KING'S Enquiry into the Constitution, &c. of the Primitive Church. Second Part. ch. iii. p. 56.

† See BISHOP PEARSON on the Creed, vol. ii. p. 341. LORD KING'S History of the Apostles' Creed, p. 260.

of the fourth century; it was subsequently introduced into the Roman creed; and from the Church of Rome it has been faithfully copied into the English Prayer-book. Rather more solicitude, however, has been manifested, to preserve the letter, than to define the meaning of the original; for, as the Bishop expresses it, this article "has always been accepted, *but* "with a various exposition:" so that, it seems, this very declaration of faith, which is designed to banish all error, and to terminate all controversy, stands itself in need of an Expositor, to rescue it from a doubtful meaning! At its first adoption by the English Church, in the fourth year of King Edward the Sixth, "it was," we are informed, "propounded with a certain explication," which referred to the 1 Peter iii. 19; as the authority on which it rested; thus seeming to countenance the interpretation of the article given by Calvin, that by *ad inferos*, or *ad inferna*, was designed, not *hades*, but *gehenna*, the place of torment. But this explication and reference being in the reign of Elizabeth suppressed, the Bishop argues, that "the Church hath not now imposed the interpretation of St. Peter's words which before was intimated," and that therefore we may "with the greater liberty pass on to find out its true meaning, according to the latitude of which the original is capable." It is rather strange, that latitude of

meaning should be the acknowledged characteristic of any part of a declaration of faith designed to exclude controversy, and that while assent to it is imperatively enjoined, we should still be at liberty to find out the meaning! It is, however, well known, that it was one of the charges of heresy brought against Archbishop Usher, by the famous Peter Heylin, that he did not believe, as the Church believed, that Christ descended to *gehenna*, but maintained, that by "hell" was intended the state of separate spirits.* This, no doubt, is the original import of the English word, which is derived from the Saxon *hīl*, to hide; and answers to the Greek *ἀδης*, the unseen place. The word hell has, however, no such acceptation in the present day, being always taken in an evil sense: the article, therefore, conveys to the common people no correct or intelligible meaning. A similar objection lies against the use of the word in the present authorized version of the Bible. This, however, is not the only article in the Apostles' Creed, that is chargeable with equivocal meaning. *The forgiveness of sins*, added in the days of Cyprian,

* " This year (1560) another great controversy arose, " which afterwards was the occasion of much persecution; it " was about *Christ's descent into hell*; and there were several of our Bishops, who were for ruining those who would " not hold that Christ went into the hell of the damned." FIBBER'S Vindication of the Dissenters. 8vo. Pt. i. p. 66.

is susceptible of a dangerous latitude of interpretation, since it may justly be suspected, from the original purpose of the Creed, as designed to be repeated by the person to be baptized, that it refers to the supposed efficacy of baptism for the remission of sins; agreeably to the article in the Nicene Creed: "I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins." Taken in connexion with the exalted epithets bestowed upon this ordinance by the Latin Fathers, it seems to countenance those notions of a sacramental virtue inherent in the rite itself, and a ministerial power residing in the Church, for the forgiveness of sins, the traces of which are still extant in the offices of the Church of England.

THE NI-
CENE
CREED.

§ 7. The Nicene Creed had its origin in the fourth century, when the Church of Christ had suffered the destruction of its spiritual character, by means of the fatal alliance between ecclesiastical discipline and secular power. In consequence of the rise of the Arian heresy, the Emperor Constantine, "in order," as Hooker relates it, "to reduce the Church unto the unity of sound belief, gathered that famous assembly of three hundred and eighteen bishops in the Council of Nice, where, with common consent, for the settling of all men's minds, that other confession of faith was set down, which we call *the Nicene Creed*, whereunto

“ the Arians themselves, which were present,
 “ subscribed also; not that they meant sincere-
 “ ly and indeed to forsake their error; but only
 “ to escape deprivation and exile, which they
 “ saw they could not avoid; openly persisting
 “ in their former opinions when the greater part
 “ had concluded against them, and that with
 “ the Emperor’s royal assent.”*

* Ecclesias-
 tical Polity.
 B. v. § 42.

Here let us pause, to contemplate with becoming admiration, this first attempt to expel heresy from the Church of Christ, by the interposition of the secular power;—the First Act of Uniformity passed by virtue of an Imperial decree! Behold its wondrous efficacy! The Arians subscribed to the Confession, in order to retain their benefices: what more could they have done? They could not believe at the requisition even of the Emperor Constantine; unless indeed the royal assent had proved more availing than the authority of the Scriptures, to settle their minds respecting the perfect Deity of Christ. They could not lay down their opinions, because they were outvoted in the Council; but they had learned the lesson of ecclesiastical submission; they subscribed: that is to say, they recognised, as far as they could do, the authority of the Church in controversies of faith. Would the learned writer blame them for this? But they did not mean “ sincerely to forsake their error!” Wherefore should they

have done so? What should have kept them from hoping, that as the question of sound belief was thus determinable by the sentence of a Council sanctioned by royal assent, another Council and another Emperor might in a short time be prevailed upon to settle all men's minds, according to those very errors which they were now called upon to resign. And what, if, out of the three hundred and eighteen bishops who composed the Council of Nice, one hundred and fifty-nine had been Arians, and the decision of the Church had trembled on the Emperor's casting vote? It would then have been a fearful chance which way all men's minds should be settled after all. The Nicene Creed might have assumed a very different complexion, and deprivation and exile might have awaited the orthodox impugnors of the authority of the Holy Catholic Church. What, then, would have been the incumbent duty of the dissenting bishops of that same Council, had the Arians obtained a majority? If it was the duty of the latter to forsake their opinions, in obedience to the decision of the Council and the royal assent, it must have been no less, under similar circumstances, the duty of the former. The authority of Councils and Emperors is only valid, perhaps, when it is the faithful interpreter of Scripture; but with whom rests the prerogative of deciding upon the fide-

lity of this interpretation? Is the authority which claims to interpret the truth, the judge of its own fidelity? If not, we must refer the determination, at last, to individual judgement. Yet what becomes of a conditional authority, the validity of which is absolutely suspended on the rectitude of its decisions? Has an Arian council no authority, while an orthodox council is in its very nature infallible, so that an Arian dissident has no right to persist in his own opinion, but an orthodox schismatic is perfectly justified? Whatever distinction there may be between the two cases on religious grounds, there can be none in ecclesiastical polity; for in either case, if the scruples of the conscientious recusant went counter to an act of uniformity, deprivation and exile would have been alike the penalty.

The Emperor's object, in summoning this Council, was to reduce the Church "unto the "unity of sound belief." No doubt, he was led by his spiritual cabinet, to expect that all men would obediently believe whatever, as the result of the deliberations of those three hundred and eighteen bishops, should be set down for the direction of their faith. It does not appear to have been part of the design, to exclude any persons from the episcopal functions, by framing such a declaration of faith as they should be incapable of subscribing: it was wished that

all should subscribe and assent to it. No preconcerted plan of the ascendant faction was, as it should seem, frustrated by the Arians who were present subscribing to the Declaration: their refusal was not anticipated with complacency, as a pretence for consigning them to exile or imprisonment; nor were any fears expressed, that the terms of subscription might not prove strait enough to prevent some of the bishops from complying with them. The Emperor's design was simply to terminate dissention by imposing a definite standard of religious belief. His error consisted in imagining, that Declarations of Faith would have any efficacy to produce conviction, or to reconcile hostile opinions; that they could either operate any change as to what persons did in fact believe, or affect the question of duty, as to what they were bound to believe; that they could have either the authority of a law upon the conscience, or the force of evidence upon the reason. Such an error in Constantine, was, however, natural, if not pardonable: but what must have been the ideas of the nature of religion and the design of Christianity, entertained by his episcopal counsellors? Did they conceive that belief or unbelief was a mere matter of opinion, which could be adjusted by the fiat of an Emperor? Who, then, were these contending parties? Were they rival sects of philosophers, each

seeking to establish its own favourite hypothesis? No: they were the assertors of the equal Deity of Christ on the one hand, and the impugnors of his Divinity on the other, striving for the mastery, threatening each other with deprivation and exile for not believing what themselves believed, and calling in a semi-pagan Emperor, to accomplish their conversion by a decree which was to settle, by imperial authority, the truth, or at least the import of Divine Revelation!

The result was such as might have been anticipated. Not only heresy refused to give place to the imperial Divine and his episcopal exorcists, but it acquired fresh strength, so as to overpower the prophets who sought to eject it by so unhallowed means. Jesus it knew, and Paul it knew, but who was Constantine? The Arians increased in numbers and in influence, till at length, as Hooker conducts the narration,—
“ Osius the antientest bishop that Christendom
“ then had, the most forward in defence of the
“ Catholic cause, and of the contrary part most
“ feared; that very Osius, with whose hand the
“ Nicene Creed itself was set down and framed
“ for the whole Christian world to subscribe
“ unto, so far yielded in the end, as even with
“ the same hand to ratify the Arian Confession.
“ But such was the stream of the times, that all
“ men gave place unto it. So that this was the

“ plain condition of those times; the whole
 “ world against Athanasius, and Athanasius
 “ against it; and half a hundred of years were
 “ spent in doubtful trial which of the two in
 “ the end would prevail.”

With respect to the Nicene Creed itself, it is, in those articles in which it differs from the more ancient symbol, about as serviceable and as intelligible to the greater part of those who are taught to recite it, as if it were given in the original Greek.* If one person in ten were asked to explain what distinct idea he attached to “ begotten of The Father before all worlds; “ begotten not made; being of one substance

* “ They who framed the Apostles’ Creed,” says BISHOP JEREMY TAYLOR, “ thought it not fit to use any words but “ the words of Scripture, particularly in the Article of Christ’s “ descending into hell, and sitting at the right hand of God, “ to shew us that those creeds are best which keep the very “ words of Scripture; and that it is better in all cases hum- “ bly to submit, than curiously to inquire and pry into the “ mystery under the cloud, and to hazard our faith by im- “ proving our knowledge: *if the Nicene fathers had done so,* “ *possibly the Church would never have repented it.* And, “ indeed, the experience the Church had afterwards, shewed “ that the bishops and priests were not satisfied in all cir- “ cumstances, nor the schism appeased, nor the persons “ agreed, nor the canons accepted, *nor the article understood,* “ nor any thing right, but when they were overborn with “ authority, which authority, when the scales turned, did the “ same service and promotion to the contrary.” Liberty of Prophesying. Chapter ii.

“ with the Father; light of light;” he would find himself in the predicament of the peasant, who, in reply to a similar interrogatory, declared, That he believed what the Church believed; and on being asked what the Church believed, answered, That the Church believed what he believed; and on being pressed still further as to what both the Church and he believed, could only reply, That the Church and himself believed the same thing. Indeed, the sense of the original creed, in some of these articles, was esteemed so ambiguous, that it was disputed whether the Nicene Fathers meant any thing more by *ὁμοστίος* than *likeness* to the Father. The word substance is, in this connexion, a purely scholastic or metaphysical term, conveying no proper idea to uneducated persons, and the theological subtleties which are enveloped in the other phrases, are not less transcendently incomprehensible: but, nevertheless, they may possibly be believed in, on the same ground that Jeremy Taylor assigns for the implicit reception which was given to the term hypostasis, when first invented: “ It was so long before it “ could be understood, that it was believed “ therefore, because they would not expose “ their superiors, or disturb the peace of the “ Church, in things which they thought could “ not be understood.”

To clear the Church afresh from its heretical

THE ATHA-
NASIAN
CREED.

corrections, a third Creed was privately drawn up, composed, according to Hooker, about the year three hundred and forty, but not at that time "so expedient to be publicly used in the Church of God, because," as he alleges, "while the heat of division lasteth, truth itself enduring opposition, doth not so quietly and currently pass throughout all men's hands, neither can be of that account which afterwards it hath, when the world once perceiveth the virtue thereof, not only in itself, but also by the conquest which God hath given it over heresy." It may be questioned whether the Apostles ever anticipated that all the world should perceive the virtue of truth; or that it would ever pass quietly and currently through all men's hands. This was not the result to which they directed their exertions as the ministers of Christ; they never entertained the idea that the praise of men, or the authority of men, should be employed to enforce the Divine authority of the gospel, or the claims of God. "Your most religious wisdom knoweth," writes Saint Hilary unto Saint Augustine; "how great the number is in the Church of God, whom the very authority of men's names doth keep in that opinion which they hold already, or draw unto that which they have not before held." And is the Church of God to be built up of such lifeless stones, such ill-

assorted materials, thus artificially cemented by the art of men? Was the religious wisdom of St. Paul acquainted with these expedients for keeping together "God's building," the habitation of the Eternal Spirit? How strikingly do such specimens of ecclesiastical polity evince, that "the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men!"

The Athanasian Creed is a monstrous specimen of the perverted zeal, and Anti-Christian animosity, which at that period infected the minds of good men; it shews how mistaken the most learned theologians may be as to the very nature of religion. As if the difficulty lay, not in bringing men to recognise the evidence and authority of the truth, but in enabling them to understand it, we have here an attempt to familiarize and explain, with the utmost logical precision, the doctrine of the Trinity, in order, as it should seem, that no excuse might be left for the most ignorant person to remain an unbeliever. So little did the doctors of the Church understand the nature of those spiritual things which, while hidden from the wise and prudent, are revealed by our Heavenly Father unto babes. The most objectionable peculiarity, however, of this Creed, is the impious presumption of the vindictive Anathema with which it closes, on account of which several distinguish-

ed prelates of the English Church have openly protested against its being imposed upon the members of a religious community. The Apostle Paul, under the guidance of inspiration, has pronounced one solemn and emphatic denunciation, and only one: "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema maranatha." In this awful sentence, it is remarkable that it is the disposition of the heart, as the seat of the religious principle, that is expressly referred to: it is not error of belief, whatsoever degree of culpability may attach to it, but malignity of character, that brands the unhappy being as accursed. The author of this Creed, or of this appendix to the Creed, has dared transfer the burden of criminality from the heart to the understanding, and having ventured to define what Scripture has not defined, and to explain what reason cannot fathom, has had the audacity to declare, that unless a man believe the Catholic faith thus explained in the unauthorized words of human wisdom, "without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost!!"*

* "But now, if I should be questioned concerning the symbol of Athanasius, (for we see the Nicene symbol was the father of many more, some twelve or thirteen symbols in the space of a hundred years,) I confess I cannot see that moderate sentence and gentleness of charity in his

The Thirty-nine Articles of Religion adopted by the Church of England, are, with a few exceptions, deemed by the greater part of the Protestant Nonconformists, unexceptionable as a declaration of religious tenets: similar objections, however, may be brought against their being authoritatively imposed. The pious founders of the Reformed Episcopacy of England, were doubtless actuated by the best intentions, and they achieved all that the state of things at that period allowed of their accomplishing: but still, "the high places were not removed;"—the grand principle of Po-

THE THIRTY-NINE ARTICLES.

" preface and conclusion as there was in the Nicene Creed.
 " Nothing there but damnation and-perishing everlastingly,
 " unless the article of the Trinity be believed, as it is there
 " with curiosity and minute particularities explained. For
 " the articles themselves, I am most heartily persuaded of the
 " truth of them, and yet I dare not say that all that are not
 " so, are irrevocably damned. Besides, if it were considered
 " concerning Athanasius' Creed, how many people understand
 " it not, how contrary to natural reason it seems, how little
 " the Scripture says of those curiosities of explication,—it had
 " not been amiss if the final judgement had been left to
 " Jesus Christ, for he is appointed Judge of all the world,
 " and he shall judge the people righteously, for he knows
 " every truth, the degree of every necessity, and all excuses
 " that do lessen or take away the nature or malice of a crime;
 " all which I think, Athanasius, though a very good man, did
 " not know so well as to warrant such a sentence." BISHOP
 TAYLOR'S Liberty of Prophesying. Ch. ii.

pery, human authority in matters of religion, so far from being rejected, was employed as the very engine of establishing a purer system of doctrine. These Articles, drawn up by Cranmer and Ridley on the model of the Augsburg Confession, were appointed by royal commission, and enforced by penal sanctions. A succeeding despot reversed the decree of her predecessor, and the nation vibrated between Popery and Protestantism, till, at length, Elizabeth, as Supreme Head of the National Church and Defender of the Faith, decided, in opposition to her bishops, that the people of England should be Protestants, and that the laws should make them so. The Thirty-nine Articles, revised and improved, were again established for the preservation of the newly-settled faith of the nation, and the laws which laid the foundation of episcopal uniformity, were sealed with the blood of the Puritans. At no period, however, have these Articles constituted, in point of fact, an expression of the sentiments of the established clergy. At the time of their being first imposed, the majority were sunk in the most deplorable ignorance, and still clung with fondness to the Papal superstition. When the Act of Uniformity took place, the opinions of the dominant faction were avowedly opposite to the whole tenor of the Articles, and the ejected clergy alone adhered to them as the model of their

preaching. In the present day, two hostile parties in the same Church are contending, the one, that the Articles should be interpreted by the Liturgy, the other, that the Liturgy should be interpreted by the Articles, while in truth, although the authority of the Articles is professedly recognised on both sides, the doctrines which they contain, are openly impugned, and inveighed against by the very prelates of the establishment.

Archdeacon Paley, indeed, sensible of the notorious discordance between the tenor of these Articles, and the belief of the English clergy, contends, that the subscriber needs not concern himself respecting the sentiments of the compilers; who are no more, he says, to be considered as the imposers of subscription, than the framer or drawer up of a law is the person that enacts it. The legislature of the 13th Elizabeth, is the imposer whose intention alone, it seems, he is bound to satisfy. The argument he adduces, in support of this singular position, affords a striking illustration of some of the preceding remarks. "They who contend," says the Doctor, "that nothing less can justify subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles, than the actual belief of each and every separate proposition contained in them, must suppose, that the legislature expected the consent of ten thousand men, and that in perpetual

“ succession, not to one controverted proposition, but to many hundreds. It is difficult to conceive how this could be expected by any, who observed the incurable diversity of human opinion upon all subjects short of demonstration.”*

• Moral Philosophy.
Vol. i. p.
217.

But, did the learned and candid writer forget, that the principles of Moral and Political Philosophy were not quite so well understood in the days of Elizabeth as in the present age? How difficult soever it may be to conceive of the fact, we well know that the incurable diversity of human opinion, was not in that day either observed or admitted; for authority was considered as possessing the force of demonstration, and as therefore superseding all counter-argument. The Church of which Elizabeth was the head, expressly claimed this authority in matters of faith; and the implicit consent of ten thousand men, was expected as part of their political allegiance. The number of propositions contained in these Articles, is a consideration of no moment; for upon the same ground that implicit assent can be required or given, with regard to one single proposition, it may be with equal reason exacted with regard to a thousand: the same individual who could bring himself to recognise human authority with respect to one point of doctrine, would find no difficulty in taking for granted the remaining

thirty-eight, or thirty-eight hundred, on the same ground. Dr. Paley conceives, however, that the authors of the law of subscription intended to exclude from the exercise of ecclesiastical functions merely the following three classes: "all abettors of popery; anabaptists; and the puritans, who were hostile to an episcopal institution." He contends, moreover, that "during the present state of ecclesiastical patronage," the danger of contentions may be effectually provided against, "by converting the articles of faith into articles of peace:" that is to say, that although a man cannot undertake to believe in them, contrary to his conviction, he is nevertheless at liberty to enter into an engagement with the legislature, to preach the doctrines he is hired to propagate, whether they accord with his private sentiments or not; or, at least, to preach nothing repugnant to the Articles which he has subscribed: a principle upon which a good Christian might obviously, with a safe conscience, accept of a benefice in a Mahomedan establishment, and live on good terms with the Koran itself.

What then is the real state of the case? The Churchmen subscribe the Articles, but for the most part do not agree with them; the Dissenters, on the contrary, believe them, but scruple to subscribe. The reason is this; the

Conclusion.

one class look upon subscription as a compliance with a political arrangement imposed by the legislature; the other, as a religious act, which no human authority is competent to demand or compel. The one consider the imposition as a necessary condition of exercising a species of magistracy emanating from the State; the other, as an invasion of the most sacred rights of men as moral beings, who can be under no obligation to believe at the will of man, or to take out commissions from the secular power to preach the Gospel of Christ. In the Church of England, the terms of communion consist of an expression of political obedience; among the churches of the Nonconformists, they relate solely to the religious character. In a National Church, articles of faith are subscribed to because they are imposed: in a voluntary society, because they are believed. In the one case, it is the authority of man which is recognised; in the other, the authority of God. As a rule of faith, articles have no claim to implicit deference: "the Bible, the Bible only is the religion of Protestants." As a test of religious character, articles, when authoritatively imposed, can be of no avail; and as a criterion of the sentiments or the preaching of those who subscribe them, experience has evinced their absolute fallacy. There is far less diversity of religious opinion among the orthodox-dissidents

from the Church of England, than among those who subscribe to her standard of uniformity.

Unity of sentiment in matters of religion, can be obtained by no other means than such as lay the foundation for congeniality of character. It is in vain to attempt to produce it by legislative enactments : it must originate in the development of principles uniform in their operation, as well as in their origin. The Christian character is not an ideal formation : it is the genuine result of the faithful promulgation of the Gospel ; and it cannot prevail without giving birth to a unity of spirit which will constitute the strongest bond of peace. Church polity attains its perfection, when it is wholly unconnected with every thing except religion, and altogether unsupported by irreligious motives. Coercion, by suspending the exercise of free-agency, and corrupt influence, by vitiating the motives of action, are equally destructive of the very principle of religion, of every thing which constitutes religious actions acceptable to God or beneficial to man.

CHAP. III.

On the Constitution of Christian Churches.

Peculiar
character of
the instru-
mentality
by which
Christianity
was esta-
blished.

§ 1. **T**HE attempt has been sometimes made, to found an argument for the truth of Christianity, on the rapidity and extent of its diffusion over the world ; and the remark of the Jewish politician, “ If it be of men it will come to nought,” has been referred to, as possessing the weight of Apostolic wisdom. The argument, however, presented in this naked form, is ill adapted to command attention from the infidel, since the religion of Mahommed, which is emphatically the work of man, a system of imposture and sensuality, so far from having come to nought, as, in order to verify Gamaliel’s general prediction, it should have done, was attended at its first promulgation with astonishing success, and has for a series of ages maintained an empire over society, more extensive than that of Christianity. It is not the rapid spread, therefore, of the doctrines taught by the Apostles, which forms in itself the presumptive evidence of their truth, but the remarkable mode in which the Christian faith was

planted, and the peculiar nature of the agency by which it triumphed over all the opposition of earthly power and infernal malignity. In this respect, the early history of the Church presents a direct contrast to the manner in which any scheme of human policy has ever been carried into execution; and the infidel can neither deny, nor on his own principles account for, the phenomenon. Yet, the argument is seldom brought forward in its native force. The greater part of those who believe in the truth of Christianity, content themselves with the mere knowledge of the fact, that it was established in spite of opposition; and they account for the event, as every other event is to be accounted for, by ascribing it to the providential agency of God; but the character of the means employed by Divine wisdom to effect this great moral achievement, and which imparts to the fact all its value as an argument in favour of the truth of Christianity, is very indistinctly apprehended, and therefore only casually referred to.

Christianity was established—and it is utterly impossible that any false religion should have been so established,—on the subversion of every prejudice and every interest of worldly pride. It would have evinced nothing short of insanity, in any man who should have devised such a method of bringing into repute a system of hu-

man invention, and the attempt would only have exposed him to pity and ridicule. Pity and ridicule, though mingled with more hostile feelings, were the very emotions which the pretensions of a crucified Messiah awakened in the minds of the politicians of that day; and that simple instrument—preaching, by which his Apostles aimed to establish his kingdom over the world, was an object of their derision. The contrariety of the circumstances of our Lord's appearance, to the anticipations of the Jewish nation, has already been adverted to, as well as the opposition which the spiritual religion he taught, presented to the universal propensities of mankind; but it was not the moral or the physical obstacles which Christianity had to surmount, so much as the peculiar nature of the *policy* employed, which vindicated its Divine origin.—That policy was, human weakness rendered instrumentally omnipotent in the hand of God.

Character
of the Di-
vine agency.

The Divine agency is in no respect more remarkably distinguished from that of human power, than in the silent potency with which physical causes operate often through means of qualities opposite to the effect, and which contribute to that effect in a mode altogether inscrutable. Substances of the most yielding and unsubstantial texture, are made the vehicle of strength and energy inconceiv-

able. To impalpable winds, to waters that part beneath the hand of an infant, are given the attributes of the mightiest agency; a cause unseen imparting to the mere passiveness of soft and flexible matter, irresistible force. In the phenomena of cold, of heat, of snow, of vapour, we have illustrations of the same wonderful accommodation of an instrumentality the most unsubstantial and perishable, to the regular and certain production of the most extensive effects. An analogous peculiarity characterizes the general methods of the Divine Providential agency. The effects produced by means of human actions, are far from being the results of corresponding qualities in the moral agent. Weakness, evil passions, ill design, are employed by the Almighty, as the blind and passive instruments of working out his beneficent purposes, in a way the very opposite to what human policy would have dictated, and which precludes our ascribing to the means the efficiency of a cause. Nothing could wear more the appearance of feebleness and inefficiency, than the physical instrumentality which was selected for laying the foundations of the Christian Church. The native character of the individuals chosen by our Lord for this purpose, was ill adapted to so vast, and what must have appeared, so daring an enterprise. At the first approach of danger, "they all forsook him and fled." The change

which was superinduced upon their intellectual character subsequently to our Lord's ascension, made no alteration in their physical circumstances. They no longer shunned danger, but they remained as defenceless as before; they became intrepid, but no accession was made to their resources. The power of working miracles, with which they were endowed, did not extend to their personal security. Peter could not deliver himself from prison, nor could James save himself from the sword of Herod. Their physical impotence, as opposed to the exterminating fury of their enemies, was consummated by the character of the religion they professed, which enjoined upon them an unresisting passiveness, forbidding all retaliation, all violence of defence, and leaving them wholly exposed to become the victims of the first aggressions of power, at a time when power united the features of cruelty and despotism. It was by "the irresistible might of weakness"* that they triumphed, "shaking the powers of darkness." God, who has made the sands to be a boundary to the waves, imparted to this passiveness the character of unconquerable strength, working by the instrumentality of contraries. Every hostile attempt on the part of the enemies of the Church contributed to the advancement of Christianity. "Because the foolishness of God "is wiser than men, and the weakness of God

* Milton.

“is stronger than men, God chose the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and God chose the weak things of the world to confound the mighty.” The light of the world was deposited in vessels of the most fragile materials, that the excellency of the power might appear to be of God, and not of men.

§ 2. Nothing is more manifest than that the success of the Gospel is attributable entirely to means with which political power and wisdom have not the remotest affinity; nor did the nature of the religion of Jesus Christ admit of the adoption of other expedients. “My kingdom is not of this world; else would my servants fight.” A religion of faith, of endurance, of love, was incapable of coalescing with the elements of compulsory force: as well might mechanical power be resorted to in order to accelerate the process of vegetative growth. The Apostles were invested with a high and peculiar authority, but their authority had no relation to the political circumstances of mankind. They disclaimed alike all legislative functions and all magisterial power. They stood forth simply as the accredited witnesses of the resurrection of Christ, and as the inspired promulgators of the doctrines they had received from him. Their whole authority was derived from their Divine commission, and by this it was limited. The miraculous credentials

On the influence of miracles as contributing to the establishment of Christianity

with which they were endowed, were requisite in order to afford sufficient evidence of the validity of their testimony, and the truth of their pretensions; and in no instance do we find them displayed for any other purpose. That such an attestation of the miraculous facts to which they bore witness, was requisite, we may gather from our Lord's declaration: "If I "had not done among them the works which "no other man did, they had not had sin." The distinction between credulity and faith, rests, not upon the antecedent probability of the fact to which our assent is invited, but upon the sufficiency of the evidence with which it is accompanied. Jesus Christ himself did not require the exercise of faith in his Divine character, without affording abundant rational evidence, by the miraculous demonstration of his omnipotence, that He and the Father are one. His answer to the disciples of John the Baptist, presents a remarkable illustration of this: "Go "your way and tell John what things ye have "seen and heard; how that the blind see, the "lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf "hear, the dead are raised, and unto the poor "the Gospel is preached." The sacred records furnish no instance of belief in Jesus Christ, marked by the tokens of Divine approbation, which had not respect to sufficient evidence as its basis. The faith of Nathanael, which is

represented as so peculiarly exemplary, was founded on the intimation afforded him by the Divine stranger, that he knew what was in man; whence he drew the conclusion that he could be no other than the Son of God, the King of Israel. In like manner, the woman of Samaria inferred, that the person who discovered so perfect an acquaintance with her character, must be the Messiah; and she used this argument to excite belief in her acquaintance: "Come, see a man who told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" The resurrection and ascension of our Lord, were miraculous facts which absolutely required that the validity of the testimony upon which they rested, should receive miraculous confirmation. The "wonders and signs" wrought by the Apostles, had this for their specific object: they were designed to establish the authority of the Apostles, in no other character than that of witnesses: "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain; and your faith also is vain: yea, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God, that he raised up Christ." The judgements inflicted upon Ananias and Sapphira, and upon Elymas, might seem at first to have a somewhat different design; but in neither of these cases will it appear upon examination, that the Apostles availed themselves of their miraculous gifts, either to enforce an implicit

obedience, or as sanctions of delegated power. Both miracles partook of the nature of moral evidence: the deputy, accordingly, who witnessed the infliction of blindness upon the sorcerer, "when he saw what was done, *believed*," "being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord."

Operation of
miraculous
evidence.

It is manifest from the very character of the miracles wrought by our Lord and his Apostles, which were almost invariably of an immediately benevolent nature, that they were adapted to convince, but not designed to compel conviction. They were addressed to the understandings rather than to the fears of mankind. We are apt to ascribe to miracles a sort of necessary effect upon the mind, as if they must in all cases act with the force of demonstration. Facts, however, incontestably prove the reverse; nor does their operation appear to differ from that of any other species of evidence. The instance of Pharaoh, and the whole history of the Israelites, evince to how dreadful a degree of impenetrability the human mind may be hardened against the strongest sensible evidence, if resolved to disbelieve: "If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." What could be a more literal fulfilment of this declaration, than the infatuated conduct of the chief priests, in consulting how they might put to death Jesus, and "Lazarus

"also,"* after our Lord had raised him from the dead? "That indeed a notable miracle hath been wrought by these men," said the rulers of the council which examined Peter and John, "is manifest to all them that dwell at Jerusalem, *and we cannot deny it*: but that it spread no further among the people, let us threaten them that they speak henceforth to no man in this name."† It is a vulgar prejudice to suppose that miracles are adequate to compel belief. Pretences would never be wanting, on which their force might be with fatal success evaded, by resolving them into natural or accidental causes, into ocular deception, or diabolical influence. Those who flatter themselves that miraculous attestations would gain more attention in the present day, do not consider that the impressive character of supernatural agency would be destroyed, in proportion as it should become familiarized by frequency; and that evidence quite as nearly approximating to demonstration, is continually presenting itself to the minds of modern unbelievers, and is still resisted. It may indeed be questioned, whether any degree of moral evidence, of which the present state admits, is absolutely sufficient to suspend the voluntary exercise of the understanding under the influence of the passions, or to interfere with man's unhappy prerogative, of wilfully rejecting

* John xii.
10.

† Acts iv.

the evidence as well as the authority of truth.

Miraculous agency was undoubtedly an important means of establishing Christianity; we must however guard against ascribing too much to its actual share in the production of the general results. The impression produced by miracles equally signal, was so far from being uniformly the same, that we must ascribe the efficiency of their operation in particular instances to some other cause than the natural force attaching to them as evidence. Miracles were not the ordinary means by which the first ministers of the Gospel succeeded in gaining converts to the faith of Christ; and we shall find upon reference to the Apostolic history, that they contributed for the most part but indirectly to the spread of the Christian religion. In inquiring into the nature of the instrumentality by which its establishment was effected, it seemed important to shew, that the miraculous power exercised by the Apostles, never assumed the character of physical might, never formed in their hands a weapon either of hostility or of defence; that it was not an instrument of conquest, nor even of intellectual violence; that its operation was purely of a moral nature; and that therefore it does not in the least affect the representation which has been given, that the triumph of the Gospel was achieved, "not

“ by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of
“ the Lord.”

§ 3. It was not long, however, that human weakness contented itself with being the passive but efficient instrument of Divine power, or that the expedients which God had chosen to confound the wise and the mighty, were left to approve their superiority to the strength and policy of man. The miraculous facts which form the basis of Christianity being sufficiently established, their credibility at least being extensively admitted, while the evidences of Christianity were receiving perpetual augmentation from the testimony and the character of believers, miracles ceased ; but the successors of the Apostles were left amply provided with every other moral means of extending the triumph of Divine truth, and in full possession of that spiritual authority which attaches in every age to the office of the Christian minister. These means, however, were not sufficient to content the over-wise eagerness of the pastors and teachers of the subsequent centuries, to convert the world. The slow progress of rational conviction, the silent efficacy of holy example, were ill-adapted to satisfy the impatient spirit of domination which soon began to infect the lords of God's heritage ; and secular authority and worldly policy being called in, soon superseded the tardy operation of moral influence. “ At this

Corruption
of Christ-
ianity by
worldly po-
licy and se-
cular power.

“time,” says Milton, “Antichrist began first to put forth his horn, and that saying was common, that former times had wooden chalices and golden priests; but they, golden chalices and wooden priests.” In the Christianity of the subsequent ages, it becomes impossible to recognise any features of the sublime and spiritual religion of Jesus Christ. That which assumed the name, was a mere engine of popular delusion and of political oppression; a monstrously complicated system of fraud, absurdity, and cruelty. The human mind, so recently emancipated from the darkness of Pagan superstition, was doomed again to be delivered up to the triumphant thralldom of infernal agency. Its moral history at this period, presents a striking analogy to that of the demoniac, out of whom had been cast an unclean spirit; “but that evil demon took to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they entered in and dwelt there; and the last state of that man was worse than the first.” To those angelic beings who rejoiced at our Redeemer’s advent, anticipating with intense desire, and affectionate sympathy, the development of the mysterious counsels of Heaven respecting this rebel portion of the universe,—to those attentive spectators of our unhappy world, who joy at the conversion of a sinner, and minister to the heirs of salvation, the moral aspect of mankind,

at this period, must have presented a scene the most awful and affecting. As it is said, in accommodation to the language of erring beings, that God, on beholding the wickedness of the antediluvian world, repented that he had made man, it might almost seem to those superior intelligencies, unless they were made acquainted with the glories that still lie concealed in futurity, that God then repented that he had redeemed him : so completely did the benevolent design of the Gospel appear at that period to be frustrated by the corrupt inventions of men !

The study of ecclesiastical history is, in some views, of the highest importance, but perhaps no study renders it more requisite that the mind should be previously fortified in the principles of Christianity, and imbued with the genuine spirit of the Gospel. The emotions which it excites, are of the most painful kind, and the reader has need constantly to recur to the certainties of Revelation, in order to regain the persuasion that Christianity is not a delusion, and that his faith is not vain. His feelings will sometimes resemble those of a man just awaked from a dream of horror, who, bewildered by the vivid impressions it has left, grasps at the sensible objects around him, in order to assure himself of their reality. The painful impression which ecclesiastical history must leave, will, however, receive some degree of alleviation from the re-

flection, that that must necessarily be, with few exceptions, the worst portion of human nature, which is thrown into prominence by the circumstances with which the historian is chiefly conversant ; that the worst predicament in which the human character can be exhibited, is that which arises from the possession of temporal grandeur ; that, therefore, the *unwritten* history of the Church of Christ, as it is preserved in that Book of Remembrance which shall one day be unfolded, would doubtless supply, even in the darkest ages of the Romish superstition, abundant instances of the genuine results of Christianity. The building up of the spiritual temple is never at a stand: it is ever receiving silent accessions of human souls, as its living materials, although no sound of mighty achievements may give intimation of the process. Amid all the circumstances which may seem to endanger the existence or to obscure the character of the Church, “ the foundation of God standeth “ sure, having this seal: the Lord knoweth “ them that are His.”

Christianity
not designed
to introduce
new politi-
cal relations.

§ 4. In prosecuting the inquiry, however, into the true nature of those laws which respect the constitution of Christian churches, and of that rule to which they are subject, it is obvious that ecclesiastical history can afford us no assistance. We must dismiss altogether from our minds the ambitious pretensions of popes:

and prelates, while we endeavour to deduce from the inspired records, notions as simplified from traditional corruptions as possible, respecting the true design of Christian institutions. The following preliminary considerations will be of service in the investigation.

In the first place, it may be confidently affirmed, that Christianity was not designed to make any alteration whatsoever in the political relations of society : it addressed itself to man in that moral capacity in which all men are on a perfect equality ; and this their absolute equality as religious beings, which leaves undisturbed all their political relations, forms one of the first principles of the Christian fellowship. As members of the Church of Christ, all respect of persons is forbidden ; all distinctions of rank cease. The Apostle James severely rebukes the early Christians for giving an invidious preference to “ the man in gay apparel,” or the rich man over the poor. “ Hearken my beloved brethren. Hath not God chosen the poor of this world ?—But ye have despised the poor.” The Saviour of the world appeared in the garb of poverty, and his Gospel was first preached to the poor ; nothing, therefore, could be more unsuitable to the character of his followers, than to carry into those religious relations to each other, which originated in their communion to their Divine Lord, notions borrowed

from the empty and artificial distinctions of rank and grandeur. Christianity did not, it is true, abolish any political distinctions, but its influence went directly to correct false estimates of their importance; and it is therefore wholly incredible that it should comprehend in its design, the creation of fresh distinctions of a kind so calculated as are ecclesiastical dignities, to feed the pride of man and to separate from one another the members of the Christian brotherhood. Whatsoever influence it was requisite should attach to certain offices in the Church, influence derived from secular circumstances, and resting upon worldly prejudices so much opposed to the spirit of the Gospel, must clearly be foreign from the design of Christianity. An individual might accidentally unite in his own person the possession of secular influence and the genuine character of moral authority, and so long as no attempt was made to apply the force of such influence as a sanction of moral or official claims, no practical evil would ensue from their being thus associated. But as soon as wealth became systematically annexed to office as an essential part of a sort of compound dignity of station, a political difference was established between the members of the church, as such, which was fatal to their religious equality. Since Christianity, however, was not designed to

exclude the wealthy and the great, some of this class, it may be argued, would gain early admission into the church; and would inevitably succeed in obtaining a natural ascendancy; as must be more or less the case in all societies, how excellent soever their constitution. But the question is not, whether this be a natural consequence, but, whether it be not an evil that requires the most jealous guard to be provided against its prevalence? To the weight of mere rank or of wealth in all free societies, the influence of talent, of character, of age, of integrity, furnishes a considerable equipoise, while the operation of moral principles serves to regulate the balance; but the system which associates wealth and power with ecclesiastical station, adopts an accidental evil—that is to say, the illegitimate ascendancy of these corrupt sources of influence—in the character of a good, and renders nugatory the force of every counteractive principle. In the case of the conversion to the faith of Christ, of the wealthy or the powerful, it may please the Almighty to render their influence and example instrumental in promoting the interests of Christianity, by overruling, as it is his Divine prerogative to do, evil for good; but when the rulers of the Church were invested with the insignia of secular grandeur, the administration of the government of the Church became thence-

forth entrusted to men in whom moral qualifications were likely to be soon merged in political character. Wealth and temporal dignity, in addition to their natural influence over the mind, received a mysterious accession of authority, by being thus associated with spiritual functions; and the Christian ministry, which has not the remotest legitimate connexion with temporal concerns, was transformed into an object of worldly ambition. The greatest possible obstacle was thus created, to its being entered upon with pure motives, as well as to the operation of Christian principles in the determination of all ecclesiastical appointments.

The aggrandisement of Christian bishops, was the first step towards the Papal usurpation. The chance that ecclesiastical honours and emoluments should devolve upon religious men, more especially after the office itself to which they were attached, ceased to be elective, became precisely equal to the chance that civil offices should be so bestowed. By whom can wealth and honour be conferred, but by the powerful and the wealthy? With whom can appointments which admit to secular emoluments and civil privileges, ultimately rest, but with the civil magistracy, the only legitimate fountain of temporal prerogative? And when the Church is thus made to depend upon the State for her pastors and rulers, that is to say, upon the po-

licy and will of worldly men, how is it possible, under the present circumstances of human nature, that the government of the Church should fall into other hands than those of the ambitious and the worldly, or that the average character of Christian bishops should exhibit any greater correspondence with the spirit and purity of the Gospel, than is common to that portion of society by which they are surrounded? What has been, under all the varying circumstances of ecclesiastical history, the fact, is sufficiently notorious. But how, we may ask, could the result have been different? What is—what can be the rule and measure of worldly men, in the distribution of their patronage, but political expediency? How should they be able to judge of those moral qualifications which are essential to the discharge of the sacred function? or, allowing them to be competent to appreciate such qualifications, how can the possession of them on the part of an individual, constitute, in their minds any reason that he should be advanced to stations of splendour and opulence? The piety of a man forms no reason that he should be made rich; his religious capacity, as a minister of Christ, constitutes no claim to secular emoluments. The claimant, then, must be distinguished by other recommendations, in order to his gaining the favour of the dispensers of this world's gifts; and those recommendations will

have little reference to the spiritual ends of the Christian episcopacy. The moral purpose of the office, must, at the very best, be a secondary consideration with those who have the disposal of its emoluments. Although the honour might originally have been designed to form a circumstance of the office, the office must come to be a mere appendage to the honour ; since political qualifications are those on which the greatest stress will uniformly be laid, or such as will be exclusively regarded, by the persons who, having the disposal of the gift, must have the determination of the claim.

But even were it possible that ecclesiastical dignities should be uniformly appropriated by men possessed of the genuine episcopal character,—as sometimes Providence has ordained that individuals of this stamp should be so distinguished, and the *Hamans* of the State be compelled to do them homage, as the men whom the king delighteth to honour,—still, those honours would form no legitimate part of the official character which adheres to ecclesiastical station. No deference would be due to the individual in his religious capacity on that ground. The civil respect due to rank, has no affinity to the moral deference which we yield to the character of the minister of Christ. His authority is entirely of a different description, and can receive no additional force from considerations

which respect the artificial distinctions of society. These Christianity teaches us to respect ; it leaves them inviolate ; but at the same time it passes sentence upon their nothingness, and disdains to employ their aid. It addresses men as moral agents, as religious beings only, in which capacity “ there is no difference : ” “ there is no respect of persons with God.”

§ 5. A second preliminary position of no small importance, is this : that all the institutions of Christianity, and therefore whatsoever offices or orders exist in the church, and with whatsoever power or authority they may be severally endowed, are designed purely for the spiritual benefit of its members at large ; whether they be apostles, or prophets, or evangelists, or pastors and teachers, they are, as St. Paul declares, “ the gifts of Christ for the perfecting of the “ saints, for the work of the ministry, for the “ edification of the body of Christ.” If the sabbath itself was made for man, and not man for the sabbath, the bishop, we may be well assured, was made for the Church, not the Church for the bishop. The proprietorship of the Church belongs to Jesus Christ alone : it is his heritage, and no part of it can be claimed by man as his freehold, without impiety. In the love which the good Shepherd bears to his flock, and which induced him to lay down his life for his sheep, the meanest individual may rest satisfied

Church government has no other object than the edification of the body.

that he is equally interested with the highest and most distinguished of his servants. His soul is of as much importance, his comfort and welfare are as much the objects of the Redeemer's care, as those of the most privileged Christian. If there is any point of view in which fellow-Christians can be considered as possessing a species of proprietorship in one another, it is the very opposite to that which is claimed by governors in the governed. "Let, therefore, no man glory in man. For all things," says the Apostle, addressing the general body of the Corinthian believers, "are your's; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas"—he repeats it, "All are your's, for ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." Our Saviour had himself previously taught the same lesson: "The kings of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that oppress them are called benefactors; but it shall be otherwise with you." The Scriptural scheme of ecclesiastical government, can then, we may be persuaded, have nothing in common with those temporal sovereignties which regard human beings as subservient to the will, or tributary to the dignity of a fellow creature. Whatsoever be its constitutional form, or how great soever its importance, the polity of the Church of Christ has no other object than the spiritual benefit of its members.

§ 6. Once more, it must be premised, that ecclesiastical rule differs from all sorts of political jurisdiction in this essential respect, that it has no bearing upon the civil interests of mankind; it does not in the least affect either their persons or their property. The Apostles were anxious to impress upon the members of the primitive Christian societies, that their having embraced the religion of Jesus Christ, did not release them from any civil obligations, and that neither did they undergo any change in their rights and privileges, as the subjects of civil government. The freeman was still a freeman, the slave was still a slave: the former might still lawfully claim his birthright as a Roman; the latter, though even his master were a Christian, was still under the bonds of servitude. In no way were the members of the Christian community withdrawn from either the control or the protection of their natural governors; they could, therefore, as respected their political capacity, be brought under no new obligations but such as were purely religious. The Apostles laid claim to no jurisdictional power. To believe, to repent, were commands which, as the ministers of Christ, they felt warranted to enforce in the language of authority, but they never assumed that tone in reference to matters of a secular nature; they never pretended to any species of political domination.

No political power involved in the authority of the rulers of the Church.

“ While it remained, was it not thine own, and “ after it was sold, was it not in thine own “ power?”—would have been an appeal wholly destitute of propriety or force, had the Christian profession involved any political subjection to the Apostles as the rulers of the Church. St. Paul indeed declares, that “ the Lord had “ ordained, that they who preach the Gospel “ should live of the Gospel.” It was but reasonable, he argues, that those who sowed unto the Church spiritual things, should reap their carnal things. He speaks of his not having availed himself of “ a power over them” in this respect, which must be understood in the sense of an undoubted right; a right, it appears, extending to the maintenance of their families, which the pastors of the Church did not scruple to use. It is however manifest, that as these ministerial rights rested upon religious considerations, the correlative duties on the part of the Church were moral, not political duties; enforced, indeed, by the strongest religious motives, but not by the decrees of jurisdictional power. It was as members of a voluntary society these duties became binding. It was as a voluntary act of professed “ subjection “ to the Gospel of Christ,” as an expression of attachment to their minister, that the Apostle insists upon the duty of their contributing to his maintenance, as well as to the relief of

the poor. Precisely the same arguments apply in all their force to the case of Christian pastors in the present day, who, possessing no political claims, are yet not the less entitled, on moral and religious grounds, to live by the Gospel which they preach. The Apostle urges the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, as the most affecting incentive to beneficence. "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though he was rich, yet for your sakes became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." He adduces the consideration that "He who soweth sparingly, shall reap also sparingly, and he that soweth bountifully, shall reap also bountifully." He adds: "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, (so let him give:) not grudgingly, but of necessity, for God loveth a cheerful giver." Neither was there any proportion specifically commanded, nor did any sort of compulsion necessitate the gift: the stress is laid altogether upon the motive. It is also observable, that the rights of the poor, to which in this last passage the Apostle alludes, are placed on precisely the same ground of obligation as the rights of the ministry.* Had the

* This is obviously recognised in the original *tripartite* division of TITHES; according to which, the clergy were admitted as claimants only in common with the poor and the necessitous.

first ministers of the Gospel been possessed of any claims but such as were founded on the principles of equity and benevolence; there could have existed neither occasion nor scope for the "bounty." Whensoever Christian ministers become invested with claims of a civil or magisterial nature, it is in consequence of an acquired power, not inherent in the sacred office, not originally attached to the ministerial character, and therefore wholly derived from a foreign authority. The State, in conferring political independence on the clergy, performs a gratuitous act of patronage, bestows that to which the Church had no previous title, and which, if withdrawn, would leave unimpaired all the native rights, and the essential moral claims of the ministers of Christ. The expediency of this patronage, with all the consequences it involves, is a question perfectly distinct from the subject of the present inquiry, which relates to the true nature of simple ecclesiastical rule, as it existed in the age of primitive Christianity.

Absurdity of
jure divino
pretensions.

We may notice here, in passing, the extreme absurdity of resting any supposed political claims of the Church on Divine right. Divine rights appeal to men as religious beings, in which capacity they are accountable to God alone. Divine rights must carry with them appropriate evidence; otherwise to recognise them

would not be an act of rational obedience. We must not be called upon to answer for a breach of obligation where we can have no certain knowledge of the law; nor for disobedience to a delegated authority of which it is impossible to exhibit the credentials. Divine rights address themselves to our faith, but it is necessary to an act of belief that it should proceed from conviction, and that the agent should be free: compulsion tends to destroy the appropriate character of that obedience which is due to the ordinances of God. If they are Divine rights, it is my duty to believe in them; but human laws cannot necessitate my belief, and ought not to do it violence. If the penal sanctions of human law be resorted to, then I am not allowed the opportunity of free obedience to the claims which are supposed to rest on the higher ground of religious obligation: the plea of Divine right becomes in that case worse than superfluous; it is in fact virtually abandoned. Nor can Divine rights constitute a reason for the institution of such enactments, for human laws rest altogether upon political obligations, and it is no part of their object to enforce the Divine commands, any further than they comprehend the ultimate objects of civil magistracy.

Pretensions, on the ground of Divine right, to any species of political power, are a flagrant insult on the common sense of mankind. Had

any such claims been advanced by the Apostles and first rulers of the Church, there would have been good reason for the hostility of heathen emperors, to a religion which so directly interfered with their prerogative and contested their authority. It would form a rational objection against Christianity, on the part of any state, that it introduced an independent jurisdiction, underived from the legitimate fountain of political power, and under pretence of ecclesiastical discipline, actually interposed between the sovereign and the subject. If any authority resided in the rulers of the Church, that extended to the levying contributions on its members, or exerting a punitive discipline, it would manifestly be a political authority, and the pretensions to a political authority independent on the civil power, would be justly characterized as usurpation and treason. A church is not a political society; neither secular rank, nor proprietorship, nor power, the circumstances and conditions of political communities, can, therefore, inherently attach to its rulers. A church is a voluntary society, and the will of its members must be the source and the limit of the power exercised by its officers. Power of a jurisdictional or magisterial character, cannot belong to the ministers of Christ.

Ministerial
authority
(of a spiri-

It is, however, a capital error to represent the Christian minister as invested with no spe-

cies of authority, but that which he derives from the choice of the people over which he is appointed to preside; as if his being a minister of Christ depended upon their will, and they could make or unmake him such by suffrage. Persons have been driven into this extreme of opinion, by the arrogant pretensions of ecclesiastics to political jurisdiction; forgetting that although a church is a voluntary society, it is not founded upon the will of man, but upon religious obligations, which constitute the relation between the minister and his people, the basis of mutual duties of the most sacred nature. Surely, the denying to the Christian pastor all political authority, does not tend in the slightest degree to weaken the foundation of his moral claims; these are as real, as unalienable, as much demand our respect, as any rights which arise from the relations of civil society. It must be confessed, that much evil has been connected with a depreciation of the moral authority of the Christian minister. The people who have been led to regard their pastor as, in respect to his authority, the creature of their choice, are not very likely to have an adequate sense of the importance of the sacred relation which subsists between a minister and his charge, so as to be duly influenced by this consideration in their election of a minister, or to be habitually regardful of the obligations under which that

tual nature,
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election places them. The Christian teacher who has no higher idea of the ministerial office than as originating in human appointment, who imagines that he needs no other credentials of being constituted a minister of Christ than the will of men, is in great danger of under-rating the responsibility, as well as the just authority, which adheres to the sacred character he has assumed. He is indeed unsuspectingly symbolizing with the advocates of opinions from which his own may seem to be the most remote: he is guilty of not less absurdity in supposing that he could receive his appointment to be a minister of Christ, from the hands of the people, than if he ascribed a similar efficacy to the imposition of episcopal hands. The pastoral office must, it is true, be *conveyed* by human appointment, and that appointment, according to the principles we are advocating, must rest with the members of the Church considered as a voluntary society; but as the exercise of the ministerial function is not bounded by the pastoral relation, so it is not in any way dependent upon it; and the spiritual authority which, distinct from the super-added claims of the pastorship, is vested in every faithful minister of the Gospel by virtue of the appointment of Christ, cannot, we are persuaded, be in any wise conveyed as a circumstance of office, by either popular or sacerdotal ordination. The laying of undue stress

upon either mode, may be equally prejudicial, as tending to withdraw the attention from the true source of ministerial authority.

§ 7. When, just before he ascended to the right hand of the Father, our Lord delivered to the eleven disciples, that commission which is generally considered as the warrant for all ministerial labours in the Church, he accompanied the command to evangelize all nations, with a promise evidently co-extensive in respect of time with that long succession of ages which it would occupy to carry forward the work to its consummation: "Lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." On this command, connected with this promise, we may safely rest the evidence of the Divine institution of the Christian ministry. There *is*, when the words are properly explained, an Apostolical succession; there *is* a transmitted commission; there is an authority derived from Divine command; there is such a thing as the presence of Christ with his faithful ministers, "even unto the end of the world."

Institution
of the
Christian
ministry.

Nothing would seem to be more clear, than that the eleven were hereby invested with a sacred office; that the office consisted in "teaching all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost;" and that it was an office capable of being devolved upon others who should, as

co-adjutors or successors in the execution of the Divine command, carry on the work to its final accomplishment. St. Paul speaks of himself as "appointed to be a preacher, and an "apostle;" to which he adds his special designation, "a teacher of the Gentiles;" and he charges his adopted son Timothy to *commit* the "things which he had heard of him, to faithful men," or believers, "who shall be able to teach others also." In these words we seem to have an illustration of the true nature of the Apostolic succession in the Christian ministry.

Nature of
the Apostleship.

The Apostles, however, sustained an office and a character altogether peculiar, and in the nature of things untransferable. St. Luke records the words of our Lord, which expressly refer to this part of their ministerial character: "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day—and *ye are WITNESSES of these things.*" St. Paul vindicates in this peculiar respect his claims to be received as an Apostle of Christ: "Am I not an Apostle? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" And in another passage: "Last of all, he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time: for I am the least of the Apostles, who am not worthy to be called an Apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God."

The authority of the Apostles is distinguish-

ed from that of all succeeding ministers, by another circumstance of equal importance. They acted not only under a commission received immediately from the hands of Christ, but with that certain knowledge of his will, which they derived from inspiration. They stood forward invested with the peculiar credentials of the "ambassadors of Christ;" a designation which, although sometimes thoughtlessly arrogated, cannot apply to any individual on the mere ground of his sustaining the function of a preacher, unless in a very secondary and restricted sense. The Apostolic character is strictly analogous to that of the Prophets of the old economy: they were called by name; they were furnished with their awful burden,—they were *sent* by God himself; and the miraculous agency of the Spirit who dictated their message, visibly attested their authority. The Scriptures of the New Testament, are the communications of the Apostles speaking and writing by the Spirit of God, not in their ministerial capacity, not merely in the character of witnesses, certainly not in the discretionary exercise of any legislative functions, but as the inspired messengers and prophets of Jesus Christ;—a character and an authority which most assuredly extended to no second link in the ministerial succession, for they had no power to delegate it to any human being. "But

“ I certify you, brethren,” says St. Paul, “ that the Gospel which was preached by me, is not after man; for I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.” He is carefully explicit in stating that, after his conversion, he purposely forbore for some time to go up to Jerusalem, to visit those who were apostles before him, lest he should seem to recognise any human authority as the source or basis of his apostleship; and when, long afterwards, he went up by special direction, to communicate to the Church at Jerusalem the dispensation of the Divine mercy towards the Gentiles, he declares that they who appeared to have the presidency, “ in conference added nothing” to him.* He was equally with James and Cephas and John, “ an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ.” It is “ upon this foundation of the Apostles and Prophets,” that the whole household of God is “ built together;”—the foundation of *inspired authority*, to which the faith of every individual Christian must have an immediate reference. There can be no succession of foundations. No supervening authority can interfere with this relation of dependence between the exercise of faith and its legitimate basis. No transmitted authority can be interposed between any individual member of the Church and the Apostles of the Lord.

* Gal. ii. 6.

In this peculiar character, they can have no successors, because their office is not expired, their authority has not ceased.

There is, however, an inferior sense in which we may extend the designation of an apostle to every faithful teacher of the Gospel, whom we may consider as the SENT of Christ; but the word, in this acceptance, is significant, not of either rank or peculiarity of office, but simply of the ministerial character. Among the ministers of Christ, as such, there is no possible room for gradation of rank, because the ministerial office itself admits of no such modification: it consists in preaching the Gospel, and if the Gospel is faithfully and intelligently promulgated, the office is fulfilled. It is this office which the Apostles committed to faithful men, charging them to commit the things which they had heard, to other believers, who also should be able to teach. The perpetuity of this ministerial succession in the Church of Christ, is obviously essential to its existence. There is no other way of gathering together its members out of the world, than by the preaching of the word. "Being born again," says St. Peter, "not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever: and this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you." And St. James declares: "Of his own will begat he

*Nature of
the ministerial
succession.*

“ us with the word of truth, that we should be “ a kind of first fruits of his creatures.” The building up of the body of Christ by the accession of these living stones, the evangelizing of all nations by the “ foolishness of preaching,” is “ the work of the ministry:” it is the same in every age. The providential agency by which the truth of Christ has been hitherto perpetuated in the Church, and the ministry carried forward in unbroken succession, notwithstanding the general corruption of Christianity, and the almost total extinction, at one time, of the light of the word of God, presents a most remarkable verification of our Saviour’s promise to his Church: “ Lo! I am with you all “ ways, even unto the end of the world.”

Source and
nature of the
ministerial
authority.

§ 9. Every faithful preacher of the Gospel, in fulfilling the will of Christ, claims to be considered as invested with a necessary *ministerial authority*; an authority simply and entirely resulting from the message which he promulgates, and the command which he fulfils; an authority under which the Christian evangelist goes forth to execute a commission extending to all nations, and to every individual of every nation under heaven; a moral or rather spiritual authority, distinct from the pastoral jurisdiction, which rests upon particular relations originating in appointment and choice; distinct from whatsoever has its source in the will of man;

and attaching to whomsoever, as the bearer of the evangelical message, we may regard as the organ of Christ. The ministry is of necessity one in kind : it must, therefore, as regards the discharge of it by any individual, be either that of " the Spirit of truth," or of " the spirit of error ;" it is either efficient, as the preaching of Christ, or it is wholly inefficient and unauthorized. Official designation, ecclesiastical dignity, can make no difference in the character of the ministry exercised by any man in the Church of Christ. The humblest self-constituted teacher, who is possessed of the appropriate credentials of the ministerial character, in the purity of his doctrines, the success of his labours, and the unblemished tenor of his life, is invested with an *authority* to which no circumstantial additaments of human appointment are requisite to impart validity: it requires no sanction from man, for with man it does not originate. A preacher may be undeniably deficient in some of those subsidiary qualifications which constitute a *natural fitness* for the office of teacher ; but the capacity for preaching the truth of Christ, so as to fulfil the purposes of the Christian ministry, is, let it never be forgotten, a spiritual capacity ; and where this is possessed, it is in vain, and worse than vain, for us to withhold our recognition of the essential character and authority of the Christ-

ian minister as existing in that individual, how humble soever his station or his acquirements. With the utmost propriety such a man may appeal to those to whose consciences he has been commended by the efficacy of his pious labours: "If I be not" a minister "unto others, yet doubtless I am to you; for the seal of my" ministry "are ye in the Lord."

Perhaps it may serve the purpose of illustration, although we must be cautious not to lay too much stress on the analogy, if we contemplate the ministerial authority as bearing the same relation to the laws of Christ, as that of the magistrate to the laws of which he is the administrator. In neither case does the derived authority extend beyond the law or the commission in which it originates; but up to that point it becomes identified with the individual who sustains the ministerial capacity; so that the respect and obedience which are respectively due to the ordinances of man and the revelation of God, are due to the person of his minister, inasmuch as his person and his capacity cannot be in our feelings separated. The character of the magistrate is, it is true, a visibly determinate character, founded on political distinctions, the credentials of which cannot be feigned or mistaken; and respecting his authority or province there can arise no controversy. The character of the Christian minister,

on the contrary, is of a moral nature, determinable only by the moral evidence which attends the truth, and by the rule of the Scriptures, its claims being addressed entirely to the conscience: hence we are commanded "not to believe every spirit, but to try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world." The analogy, however, holds good to this extent: there is an authority attached alike to the civil and to the sacred office, which in the person of the officer we are bound to recognise and to respect; an authority not personally inherent, but derived from the laws of which he is the minister.

False views of the *source* of the authority vested in the Christian minister, have led to a very different and pernicious use of this very analogy. The magistrate, it has been argued, is not a self-constituted officer: mere ability constitutes no right to act in any political capacity; his commission must be regularly obtained from the source of civil power. It is therefore, we are told, subversive of the interests of the Church, to allow of the legitimacy of a self-constituted ministry, or to admit that "mere sufficiency gives a man authority to set up as a public teacher of what he really knows."* The necessity of human appointment, has been represented as a principle equally applicable to civil

* BR. HORR-
LEY'S Ser-
mons, vol. 1.
p. 313.

and to ecclesiastical polity, and disturbers of the ecclesiastical constitution, it is contended, should not be suffered to go loose, while other madmen are confined.

On the
phrase self
constituted.

Self-constituted implies the not being constituted by the authority competent to legitimate and appoint: in this general sense we may safely unite in deprecating a self-constituted ministry. But the question is, whether human appointment is the source of spiritual authority, as it is of civil power. The Apostles were not self-constituted; yet man had no share in their appointment: they were constituted apostles by Jesus Christ. There is a preliminary point, then, to be ascertained; *what* constitutes a Christian minister. The qualifications for the exercise of political functions are communicated in the power conferred. Are the qualifications of a Christian minister derivable from a similar source? We maintain that they are of a purely spiritual character; that the authority vested in the preacher of the Gospel, is derived immediately from the message which he publishes, under the warrant of Christ; that the credentials of this authority are to be sought for in the correspondence of his ministerial labours with the dictates of inspired truth, by which he commends himself to every man's conscience as in the sight of God; and that this spiritual *magistracy* is *not* transmitted by commissions

issuing from any human authority, but has its source in the supreme fountain of power and dominion in heaven and on earth. He alone can constitute and appoint his faithful ministers, who has the omniscience requisite for that purpose. The self-constituted minister is the man whom he has not appointed, to whom his word affords no warrant, whose commission is the forgery of human wisdom, and not obtained from the legitimate source from which all spiritual qualifications emanate.

Truth, by whomsoever it is promulgated, cannot but possess the same intrinsic authority. The fact that an individual does or does not preach the truth of Christ, cannot be made to depend upon any hypothesis respecting his having, or his not having the right to preach it. If he preaches the Gospel, the fact is placed beyond dispute that he is competent to the exercise of the Christian ministry, and what is there that can be interposed between the competence and the right? Were our assent required to this position, that it is not every one who chooses to assume the ministerial function that is competent to discharge it with fidelity and efficacy, there would be no difficulty in coming to an agreement; but the advocates of ecclesiastical restrictions, proceed upon the supposition that the self-constituted teacher is possessed of the requisite knowledge, the moral competency; a

General
right to
preach the
Gospel.

thing very different from mere choice; nevertheless, his right and his authority are represented as dependent on human appointment. If, however, as we believe, this authority is of a purely spiritual nature, and the preaching of the Gospel is one of those religious actions which are not subject to magisterial control, while we deny that any man may preach merely because he chooses, we affirm that his choice, which may possibly spring from a sense of duty, is a sufficient reason in the sight of man. A person cannot be said to believe because he *chooses* to believe; he does not understand that which he preaches because he *chooses* to understand it. The will is not itself the adequate cause of such voluntary actions. If there is any truth in the Scripture declaration, that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are Spiritually discerned, but he that is spiritual judgeth all things,"—then, we must admit that a capacity for preaching the Gospel with intelligence, is not a matter dependent either on human fancy on the one hand, or on political regulations on the other. The usurpation of the sacred office by incompetent persons, is an evil which the interposition of ecclesiastical restrictions is ill adapted to mitigate.

But further: every individual has a natural right to the free assertion and argumentative

maintenance of his own opinions, provided those opinions are not subversive of social order. If no objection lies against the nature of his sentiments, no criminality can attach to the most unreserved expression of them. It would be indeed strange that this natural right should be lessened in proportion to the certain truth and supreme importance of what he teaches. Yet those who would restrict the exercise of the Christian ministry, rest their arguments on this consideration, that it is the Gospel which is preached. The objection is taken, not against the truth of what is taught, but against the authority of the teacher, as if his natural freedom in respect of the assertion of what he knows to be true, and feels to be infinitely consequential, underwent some mysterious modification, when the truths which he labours to propagate relate to the salvation of the soul. "Master," said the disciples to our Lord, "we saw one casting out demons in thy name and we forbade him, because he followeth not with us." Our Lord's reply stands on record as a reproof of the officious zeal of those who, in a similar spirit of worldly wisdom and sectarian policy, would impose laws on the Church which Christ has not imposed, and exclude from the ministry those whom he has not excluded:—"Forbid him not; for he that is not against us, is for us."—"Wherefore I give you to understand,"

says St. Paul, when treating expressly of spiritual gifts, and of the essential unity of the Church, "that no man speaking by the Spirit
 " of God, calleth Jesus accursed, and that no
 " man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by
 " the Holy Ghost. There are diversities of
 " operation, but it is the same God which work-
 " eth all in all." Neither the right, then, to exercise the ministerial function, nor the authority annexed to it, originates in the will, or is dependent on the appointment of man.

The term *Minister* has all along been used in reference to what must be considered as the main purpose of the sacred function, the preaching of the Gospel, and it has been the object of the preceding remarks to place in their true light, its moral claims and intrinsic authority. It is not meant to deny the existence of specific offices in the Churches of Christ: these of course imply appointment as the source of whatever power is requisite for discharging them, and to office, which comprehends in some way or other a representative trust, no man can be considered as having any natural right. Of this nature are those two distinct offices of rule and superintendence, which we recognise as belonging to the primitive constitution of Christian societies,—the pastorship, and the office of the deacon. The province of the preacher is of far wider circumference, and may be termed in

great measure *extra-ecclesiastical*. In this point of view, we might contend that it could not come under the control of ecclesiastical jurisdiction, unless that jurisdiction were, agreeably to the Papal hypothesis, co-extensive with universal empire. A Church has a right to withhold its sanction from any action, whether performed by its own members, or by persons without its pale; but the power to hinder any individual from exercising any natural right, must, after all, rest with the civil magistrate. The State is not, however, a competent judge in these matters, and since it is not the source of religious rights, or spiritual authority, it cannot legitimately interfere in their exercise. Yet, if the State confers this power on ecclesiastical rulers, in its very appointment of the persons with whom the discretionary authority is to rest, it is guilty of this interference; it assumes to be a judge in matters of religion; and thus the power or right to preach the Gospel of Christ, supposed to proceed from the Church, is made ultimately to depend upon the will of the civil magistrate. The Rabbincal apologue employed to illustrate the conspiracy of the body and the soul in the act of sin, may be well applied to this monstrous stratagem for blending ecclesiastical jurisdiction with secular power. The one, like the body, is strong, but blind; the other, like the soul, has sight, but is lame and impotent; but let blind

Power take the Church upon its shoulders, and what the one cannot see, and the other could not reach, although it belongs to neither, becomes the prey of both.

Ecclesiastical officers.

§ 9. Protestant Nonconformists hold, that there are two distinct orders of ecclesiastical officers, and only two specified in the New Testament, as having the ordinary superintendence of Christian societies,—bishops and deacons. By bishops, they understand the pastors or ruling elders of the congregation; by deacons, the officers appointed to manage the secular concerns of the Church, more especially to take care of the poor. On this point they are at issue with Episcopalians, who contend for three orders of clergy, as of Apostolic institution, under the threefold distinction of bishops, presbyters, and deacons. These three orders are, in fact, only three gradations of rank; the same office, with the exception of certain prerogatives arbitrarily attached to each, being common to all the three. That distinction which we observe broadly laid down in Scripture, between the province of the pastor and that of the deacon, on the ground of *office*, is, upon the Episcopalian hypothesis, made to consist entirely in subordination. The office of the deacon, as consisting in the management of the Church funds, is not indeed altogether lost, but it is administered by persons distinguished by an ap-

pellation which, strange to say, does not rank among the ecclesiastical orders of the hierarchy. In the Church of England, what in the New Testament phraseology would be termed deacons, are the churchwardens, who are empowered to exercise a species of parochial jurisdiction more extensive, and in some respects more important, than that of the rector himself. The hierarchy, however, instead of consisting of only three orders, is found to be composed of archbishops, bishops, deans, prebendaries, archdeacons, presbyters, and deacons; the latter two classes being distributed into rectors, vicars, and curates: so that the question of the Apostolic origin of three orders, except as respects their supposed subordination of rank, becomes wholly impertinent. Bishop Horsley,* indeed, with characteristic boldness, ventures to maintain, that in the Corinthian

* "When it is considered that not fewer than nine different ecclesiastical offices, distinguished by their different gifts, appear to have been subsisting at Corinth when this Epistle was written,—and that by the consent of the most learned in ecclesiastical chronology, this Epistle was written so early as the fifty-seventh year of our Lord,—it should seem that the formation of a Church—the constitution of a hierarchy, composed of different orders, which orders were appointed to distinct duties, and invested with distinct *rights*,—was a thing of so great antiquity, as may leave no doubt remaining with any reasonable man, of the Divine authority of the Institution." *Sermons*, Vol. 1. p. 314.

Church, there existed, under Apostolic sanction, a ninefold gradation of rank; and he attempts to substantiate his strange assertion, by the enumeration, in parallel columns, of the gifts, and what he deems the corresponding offices, as specified in the eighth, ninth, and tenth verses, compared with the twenty-eighth verse, of the twelfth chapter of St. Paul's first Epistle. All the distinct gifts were, his Lordship admits, of the extraordinary kind: these having ceased, the offices may fairly be presumed to be obsolete. Upon examination, however, it would be found rather difficult to clear up the imagined relation between "the gift of Prophecies or Predictions," and the office of "Helps," (*Αντιληψεις*), to which it is assigned; unless indeed we risk the conjecture, that these Helps were a species of lay-preachers. Again, there does not appear to be a very satisfactory connexion between the gift of "Discerning of Spirits," and the office of "Governments" (*Κυβερνησεις*); but the learned Bishop doubtless perceived the relation. Abandoning, therefore, the trite hypothesis of uniformity of government in the Church, he thought it more prudent to adduce the precedent of this imaginary nine-fold institution, in vindication of the ecclesiastical frame of the Church of England, than to rest the whole weight of the hierarchy upon the slender platform of bishops, priests, and deacons. But, did the learned

writer overlook a passage occurring in an Epistle written to another primitive Church, and which is not less decisive on this point? "Having "then gifts," says the Apostle, "differing according to the grace that is given us, whether "prophecy, let us prophecy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our "ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; "or he that exhorteth, on exhortation; he that "giveth, let him do it with simplicity, he that "ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness."* Now, if the essential being of a Christian Church, consisted in its form of government, and every function must be appropriated to some distinct order, it might be a suitable exercise of critical speculation, to arrange the rank, and define the rights and titles, of the *givers*, and the *shewers of mercy*, who, together with the prophets, the ministers, the teachers, the exhorters, and the rulers, made up this sevenfold hierarchy of the first Church of Rome; as well as to find a reason why "he "that giveth" is assigned a precedence, in the order of enumeration, over "him that ruleth." Leaving, however, these reveries of the learned Bishop, we shall proceed to institute an inquiry, in the first place, into the nature of the Christian deaconship.

* Rom. xii.
6. 8.

§ 10. Mosheim supposes, that the Church at Jerusalem had, from the first, its inferior mi-

Office of
Deacon.

nisters or deacons, and that these are referred to in the fifth of the Acts, under the appellation of *young men*. He considers the seven deacons chosen by order of the Apostles, as having been added to the original number ; and as having been purposely selected from the foreign Jews, in order to remedy the dissensions which arose on the part of the Grecians, from the suspicion of partiality in the distribution of the offerings presented for the support of the poor. This notion receives, however, no support from the New Testament ; for it is evident that the appointment of the seven deacons, was expressly designed to relieve the Apostles themselves of a laborious service which interfered with their discharge of the higher and more peculiar functions of their ministry. It is also clear, that these officers were not chosen from among the young men of the Church, nor was the office itself one of a subordinate nature, or of inferior dignity. The multitude or congregation, were directed to look out for " seven men full of the " Holy Ghost and of wisdom : " they were to elect them ; which suggests the idea of their being invested, in consequence of that election, with official superiority, otherwise, it would hardly have been necessary that the Apostles should so solemnly refer it to the choice of the people. Their appointment was moreover accompanied with all the significant circumstances

that could dignify the transaction. Besides, is it credible, that any ministers of at all similar functions, should have been previously appointed, and the inspired historian maintain an utter silence as to their names and their office? The deacons of the church at Jerusalem, were, it is manifest, not servants, but governors; and it appears from St. Paul's Epistle to Timothy, that so far from deacons being in general young men, they were required to be fathers of families and men of gravity, who had been first "proved" and "found blameless;" or, as it is expressed in the Acts, "men full of the Holy Ghost and of wisdom."

Although the deaconship pertained exclusively to the temporalities of the Church, it was a service which the Apostles themselves had not thought it beneath them to discharge, and which they relinquished only because it interfered with their higher duties. It was, in fact, a service which demanded all the discretion and all the authority of age. Both Stephen and Philip, if not the other deacons, exercised the function of preacher; the former accompanied his ministry with the performance "of great wonders and miracles;" the latter baptized "both men and women." That the deacon did not, however, by virtue of his office, belong to what ecclesiastical writers have been pleased to term the priesthood, that he was properly a *laic*,

appears from the reason assigned for the institution of the order. The Apostles said : " It " is not reasonable that we should leave the " word of God, to serve tables ;" and they recommended the congregation to select seven men for this express purpose, that they might be relieved from the interruption which such cares occasioned in their spiritual engagements : " But we will give ourselves continually to " prayer and to the ministry of the word." The ministry of the word would not, then, be the proper business of the deacon, nor indeed any spiritual charge, since the Apostles found it impracticable to give attention to both the temporal and the spiritual concerns of the church, and ordained the deacons for the specific superintendence of the secular business. Nevertheless, they were laid under no restrictions, in consequence of the appointment, which rendered it contrary to order that they should preach the Gospel. They had no spiritual charge, but the exercise of the function of preacher, was open to the members of the church ; it was in fact, in many cases, a duty resulting from the extraordinary gifts with which the first disciples were for the most part endowed. The distinction of clergy and laity had then no existence ; it receives no countenance from the Apostolic records. All the members of the Christian community were

alike "God's clergy," "a holy priesthood," by virtue of their regeneration, "a kind of first fruits of his creatures."

The deacons were, in common with the rest of the brethren, subject in their private capacity to pastoral jurisdiction. Gradations of rank, however, had no place in the primitive Church, nor is it to be supposed that any inferiority was considered as attaching to the office of the deacon in consequence of the secular nature of his services. It was a degree, indeed, in point of order and authority, below that of the bishop, but it was a most honourable degree. Any station, any office in the Church, how humble soever, was doubtless esteemed a post of dignity; and the common sentiment which pervaded the Christian brotherhood, was in unison with the devout spirit of the Psalmist: "I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than dwell in the tents of wickedness." But the deacon was the officer to whom, had any species of magisterial power existed in the Church, that power, by right of office, belonged. He was the most suitable person to exercise that species of jurisdiction, which consisted in arbitrating differences among the members of the Church, respecting matters of civil property and right; a jurisdiction which, when assumed by the pastor, laid the foundation of a further and

most dangerous extension of the episcopal prerogative. The reason assigned for the institution of the diaconship, ought to have prevented, as it evidently discountenanced, the assumption of judicial functions on the part of the bishop; but, when once a spirit of ambition began to actuate the pastors of the Church, and the notion of a Christian priesthood founded upon supposed analogies between the Jewish hierarchy and the New Testament ministry, began to prevail, "prayer and the ministry of the word," no longer engaged the exclusive attention of the spiritual overseers of the flock. Jealous of pre-eminence, tenacious of the supposed rights of the sacred order, they grasped at every thing which promised to strengthen their ascendancy. The separation, first of rank, and then of order, introduced between the people and their ministers, on the pretence of an ecclesiastical sanctity attaching to official character, was widened more and more, as all moral distinctions gradually faded before that of authority. In this manner, the office of deacon became degraded,* as that of presbyter was extended and magnified. When, however, the presbyters began to emulate the bishops themselves in ambition and luxury, the deacons soon followed their example, and, aspiring to higher privileges and

* Ignatius terms deacons "the Church's servants," and "deacons of meats and drinks."

rights, were naturally led to despise those meaner functions which were all that the usurpation of the higher orders had left them.* Then were brought into the Church that strange multiplicity of orders—sub-deacons, *acolythi*, or attendants, *ostiarii*, or door-keepers, readers, exorcists, and *copiatae*, a sort of superior sextons;† all, according to Roman writers, of Apostolic institution; and the hierarchy, thus extended at its base, and narrowing as it towered, approached its pyramidal perfection. The *sub-deacons* were held to be so subordinate to the superior rulers of the Church, that by a canon of the council of Laodicea, they were forbidden to sit in the presence of a deacon, without his leave! So rapid had been the retrogression of the human mind, and the decay of the spirit of Christianity, towards the end of the third century.

† MOSHEIM,
Cent. III.
P. ii. p. 268.

In the Nonconformist churches, the office of deacon is preserved, under its primitive appellation, in strict conformity to the regulations of the New Testament. The persons chosen for the deaconship, are generally elders of the church in respect of age, men of standing and

* “ The deacons, beholding the presbyters thus deserting
“ their functions, boldly usurped their rights and privileges;
“ and the effects of a corrupt ambition were spread through
“ every rank of the sacred order.” MOSHEIM, Cent. III.
Part ii. Ch. 2.

of piety. Upon them are devolved the care of the poor belonging to the church, and the few secular concerns of the community. The provision made for the support of the minister, is also usually confided to their superintendence. In the absence of the pastor, one of them, in capacity of elder, presides over the occasional meetings of the church, whether for social prayer or for ecclesiastical business. It is strictly within their province, to visit and relieve the poor and the sick of the congregation. In the celebration of the Eucharist, it is their office, agreeably to the ancient practice referred to by Justin Martyr, to deliver the elements to the communicants; the business of preparing the bread and wine, and of cleansing the sacramental cups, which anciently devolved upon the sub-deacons, being performed by the door-keepers, who are the hired servants of the church. In some respects, the Nonconformist deacon corresponds to the churchwarden of the Establishment.

With regard to the appointment of deacons, it should seem to be out of question, that in the only instance upon record in the Apostolic annals, it took place by popular nomination or suffrage, sanctioned by the solemn ratification of the Apostles. When Paul and Barnabas ordained elders in every city which they visited in which there existed a church, it does not

appear that they considered themselves as authorized to appoint deacons over the secular affairs of the community: this they in all probability left to the discretion of the members of the several societies. It may be thought, from St. Paul's direction to Timothy, that although the people elected their deacons by suffrage, the ultimate appointment rested, in some degree, upon the sanction of the presiding pastor, since the description given by the Apostle, of the requisite qualifications, was, it is evident, primarily designed for the guidance of Timothy himself in the discharge of his extraordinary commission. The character of the deacon would, however, require to be approved by the same tests, with whomsoever the election rested. Nor can it be with any propriety inferred, from the extraordinary commission given to Timothy, as the delegate of the Great Apostle, and which comprehended the appointment both of bishops and deacons, that any such prerogative attached to the ordinary pastors of the church. That such directions occur in the Apostle's charges to Timothy and Titus, and not in any one of his Epistles to the churches, is easily to be accounted for, since the latter were for the most part written subsequently to his personal visits to those churches, of many of which he was the actual founder; at all events, some time after they had assumed the form of a church:

there was, therefore, no occasion to transmit to them instructions similar to those given to Timothy and Titus, which respected the constitution of societies not yet formed. The nature of the deacon's office, indeed, renders it indispensable, that it should be conferred with the consent, if not by the nomination, of the people, forasmuch as to him are committed the care and distribution of the funds voluntarily contributed to the maintenance of the poor; a trust which involves a responsibility of which the members at large would claim to be the proper persons to take cognizance. Among the Protestant Dissenters, the deacons are not unfrequently elected by ballot. Thus much may suffice, then, to illustrate the nature of this ecclesiastical office.

On the title
of ELDER.

§ 11. We now proceed to the consideration of that higher official character which we find referred to so often in the New Testament, under the titles of presbyter or elder, and overseer or bishop; the identity of whose rank and office, is the principal subject of controversy, in relation to the primitive form of ecclesiastical government.

That the term elder, and the office of bishop, are ascribed in the New Testament to the same individual, is a point clear beyond all dispute. The passage in the twentieth chapter of the Acts, (v. 28.) would be sufficient to establish this position. It is not less certain, that elders

and bishops are never referred to in any one passage, as co-existing different orders. We read repeatedly of "the Apostles, the elders, "and the brethren" of the church at Jerusalem. In the Epistle to the Philippians, St. Paul particularizes the bishops and deacons of the church. In the Epistles to Timothy and Titus, also, the offices of bishop and deacon are specially adverted to, while no mention is made of elder in the same connexion. When the title of bishop occurs, that of elder is dropped, and when the Apostolic writers speak of the elders, they are silent with regard to bishops. Had there been more than two orders in the church at Philippi, when St. Paul addressed to them his Epistle, it cannot be imagined that he would have omitted to specify the third in his salutation, especially since the deacons, whom he does mention, are supposed to have sustained the inferior station. Had he associated the words elder and deacon, it might have been contended, that under that indefinite term, more than one description of officers was included; but the title of bishop is confined in its application to one. Again, when we read of elders being ordained in every church, no mention is made of there being likewise bishops appointed. Lastly, the Apostle, when specifying the requisite qualifications of a Christian bishop, and of a deacon, is

wholly silent as to the qualifications of a presbyter.

It would seem to be sufficiently manifest, therefore, that the terms presbyter and bishop, as used by the New Testament writers, never imply different offices. It does not, however, follow, as it has been sometimes hastily taken for granted, that the two words are of identical import. There is reason to doubt, whether *presbyter* is ever used in the sacred writings, as, strictly speaking, a term of office, in reference to the Christian ministry. It frequently means nothing more than an elder or senior in respect of age; as, for example, when St. Paul directs Timothy not to rebuke an elder, but to intreat him as a father, the elder women, (*presbyteresses*, the same word with a feminine termination,) as mothers, and the younger men as brethren. It is applied to persons occupying very different stations in the Church, and it is assumed by the Apostles themselves.

In reading the Apostolic history, it is necessary to bear in mind, that not only were the sacred writers themselves, by birth and by education, Jews, retaining in all their habits and predilections the national character, but that in the events and transactions which they record as taking place in the Christian Church, and in Christian society, the agents were for the most part Jews likewise, in every respect

but that of Christian belief. The Apostles, whensoever their prejudices were clearly in opposition to the dictates of the Holy Spirit, did not hesitate to sacrifice every consideration and every feeling to a sense of duty; yet they displayed on all ordinary occasions, in their modes of thinking, and in their line of conduct, a natural preference for the customs of their fathers; and this was strengthened by a desire to conform, as far as was lawful, to the prejudices of their less enlightened fellow-countrymen. In some respects, they were disposed to carry this conformity to a dangerous extent, so that the Apostle Paul felt himself compelled openly to reprove Peter for consulting the national prejudices of the Jewish converts, so far as to refuse to eat with the Gentiles. In all the institutions of Christianity, we may perceive a Jewish origin, and the traces of Jewish customs. This similarity was not, I apprehend, always designed, but rather arose out of the natural operation of previous usage. It is not a little remarkable, that while the Jewish writings of the Old Testament, have been so industriously searched for the types and precedents of supposed analogical institutions in the Christian Church, so little account should have been taken of the accidental influence of early habits and national manners on the minds of the New Testament writers, as illus-

trating both the facts of ecclesiastical history, and the language in which those facts are recorded.

On the
Synagogue
govern-
ment.

With regard, more especially, to the government of the primitive Churches, Grotius contends that it was wholly modelled on that of the synagogues.* The Jewish synagogues were under a government peculiar to themselves, distinct from the civil consistories; there being in every synagogue so many elders as to make a bench or consistory, who had a place appropriated to them as the governors of the synagogue. Not only the rabbins, but also the preachers or lecturers, were ordained by imposition of hands; a ceremony which accompanied the conferring of all public offices, civil as well as ecclesiastical. In every synagogue there was, besides the other elders, a superintendent

* “ Totum regimen Ecclesiarum Christi conformatum fuit “ ad synagogarum exemplar.” Grotius, as quoted by Stillingfleet. “ We are to take notice,” remarks the Bishop, in this connexion, “ how much our Saviour, in the New Testament, did delight to take up the received practices among “ the Jews, only with such alterations of them as were suitable to the nature and doctrine of Christianity; as hath “ been abundantly manifested by many learned men, about “ the rite of the Lord’s Supper, taken from the *post cœnium* “ among the Jews; the use of baptism, from the baptisms “ used in initiating proselytes; and excommunication from “ their putting out of the synagogue.” *Irenicum*, P. II. Ch. vi. § 4.

of the public service who called out the seven readers in order, and whose peculiar office it was, to pray for and to bless the people: his primacy in rank included, however, no jurisdictional pre-eminence. This presiding minister is supposed to be the officer intended by Jewish writers under the title of the Angel of the Congregation,* and he is alluded to in the Sacred Scriptures† as the archisynagogue, or chief ruler. Epiphanius, indeed, parallels the *Ἀρχισυνάγωγος*, *πρεσβύτερος*, and *Ἀζανίτης*, among the Jews, to the Bishops, Presbyters, and Deacons, of the Christian Church; but little stress is to be laid upon such analogies. There appears, however, to be a strong probability, independent of these coincidences, in favour of the supposition, that the Apostles did in great measure adopt the customs of the synagogue, in the modelling of the Church. Our Lord himself had set them the example of a condescending conformity to the manners and habits of the Jews. No other plan was familiar to them; no other could have been introduced with equal facility; nor was there any reason, as Bp. Stillingfleet remarks, that they should slight the constitution of the synagogue, since

† Acts xviii.
8. 17.

* “He was *Angelus Dei*, as he was *Inspector Ecclesiæ*, “because the angels are supposed to be more immediately “present in, and supervisors over, the public place and duties “of worship.” *Irenicum*, Ch. vi. § 7.

“ it had no dependence on the Jewish hierarchy, and subsisted not by any command of the ceremonial law.” It imported nothing typical; it involved nothing of a nature burdensome or offensive to the Gentile Christians; it was, therefore, in every respect suitable to the churches in Apostolic times. “ For church officers acting then,” remarks the learned writer already referred to, “ either in gathering or governing churches, without any authority from magistrates, such a way of government was most suitable to their several churches, as whereby the churches might be governed, and yet have no dependence upon the Secular Power, which the way of government in the synagogue was most convenient for. For the Jews, though they enjoyed a bare permission from the civil state where they lived, yet, by the exercise of their synagogue government, they were able to order all affairs belonging to the service of God, and to keep all members belonging to their several synagogues, in unity and peace among themselves. The case was the same as to synagogues and churches; these subsisted by the same permission which the others enjoyed; the end of these was the service of God, and preserving that order among them which might best become societies so constituted. There can be no reason then as-

“ signed, why the Apostles in settling particular churches, should not follow the synagogue in its model of government.”*

* *Irenicum*,
Pt. II. c. vi.
§ 9.

And is there any sufficient reason, (to digress for one moment from the immediate subject,) that particular churches in the present times, should not be allowed to follow the Apostolic model, and to adopt this most convenient mode of government? In what do the legitimate ends of ecclesiastical government, now, differ from those which the Apostolic constitution of the primitive churches was found the most suitable to accomplish? The learned writer, in this description of the circumstances and discipline of the Jews and early Christians, has drawn an exact representation of the state of Protestant Dissenters in this kingdom. Although they “ enjoy a bare permission from the civil state in which they live,”—and this bare permission is, as respects the exercise of their religious rights, all that they require,—yet, by the exercise of that congregational government which bears so close a resemblance to that of the synagogue, “ they are able to order all affairs belonging to the service of God,” and to keep the members of their respective societies in unity and peace; and these they conceive to be the only ends of ecclesiastical institutions. How shall we account for it, that the learned writer, after candidly set-

ting down this as his deliberate opinion relative to the model of the primitive church polity, and after keenly exposing the absurdity of the attempt to establish the Divine right of Diocesan Episcopacy, should end in disputing the right of Christians in the present day, to adopt that ancient mode of ecclesiastical government, and in contending for the very Diocesan Episcopacy, as established by the Civil Power, which he has shewn to have had no existence in the Apostolic age?

Original import of
Presbyter.

To return to the consideration of the term presbyter. Its original import, like that of the Hebrew *zēn*, it is well known, denoted age. Among the Hebrews, age was an object of peculiar veneration, and was considered as conferring a natural authority and pre-eminence. The title of age, therefore, agreeably to many similar facts in the history of language, became significant, first of the species of patriarchal presidency it involved, and then of official authority. Bishop Stillingfleet remarks, in explanation of the origin of its secondary meaning: "Because wisdom was supposed to dwell with a multitude of years, therefore persons of age and experience, were commonly chosen to places of honour and trust, and thence the name importing age, doth likewise carry dignity along with it;"

* See, for a further illustration of this use of the word, Gen. xxiv. 2. "And Abraham said unto the eldest servant

but it is perhaps a more simple way of accounting for this extension of its application, to refer it to the natural progress of government. In the early stages of society, every head of a family possessed a species of magisterial authority over his household and dependents, which, in the heads of the chief families, amounted to a princely dignity. The elders of the tribes are continually referred to, in the sacred writings, as exercising a species of feudal jurisdiction. The title of elder is given to the seventy whom Moses appointed to share with him the burden of magistracy. The word subsequently occurs in connexion with some species of civic office. We read of "elders of the city,"† and of "the elders of every city:"‡ a use of the word which brings to mind our Saxon *elderman*, or alderman. In all these instances, the appellation appears to denote the original source of the authority which became in process of time attached to office, irrespectively of the circumstance of seniority. The elders of the synagogue were ordained officers, exercising ministerial and judicial functions. They are generally designated by the specific appellation of rulers, and are never sim-

† Deut. xix.

12.

‡ Ezra x. 14.

" of his house, (Gr. *πρεσβύτερος τ' οἰκίας*) *that ruled over all that he had,*" &c. In this passage, age is to be considered as either a term importing, or a circumstance conferring, pre-eminence.

ply mentioned as presbyters; the former being a term of office, the latter, an indefinite term importing power and dignity in general.

In the New Testament, the word presbyter is used with similar latitude, but uniformly as conveying the idea of honourable pre-eminence. Sometimes, it denotes simply the seniors of the church, or heads of families, on whom, prior to any constituted form of polity, the government of the assembly would naturally devolve; at other times, it is indiscriminately applied to all the officers of the church. The Apostle John, in both his second and third Epistles, styles himself **THE ELDER**; and since we cannot suppose that he designed to waive in those Epistles his Apostolic authority, we must conclude that he employed the term as one of equal weight and significance. Nor would the Apostle Peter, in exhorting the elders to take upon themselves the episcopacy of the church, have asserted his authority under this very title—"who am also an Elder,"—unless with that word had been associated ideas of presidency and dignity.

The first mention that is made in the Apostolic history, of Christian elders, is incidental. The disciples of Antioch transmitted relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea, which, it is said, "they sent to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul."* In a subsequent

* Acts xi.
30.

chapter, we read of a second deputation being sent to consult the church at Jerusalem, respecting the disputes raised by the Judaizing teachers, with regard to the ceremonial law; on which occasion, the "Apostles, elders, and brethren" of the church at Jerusalem, are repeatedly mentioned. We have, however, no proof that at that period any specific office, except that of deacon, had an existence in the church at Jerusalem, for the Apostles themselves sustained the episcopacy. The Apostles and elders, to whom the mission was directed, "came together to consider of the matter," "the multitude" of the disciples being also present. In other words, the Apostles, who on all occasions on which they did not act by immediate inspiration, consulted with the members of the church, and acted in concert with their suffrage, summoned the aged members to deliberate upon the answer to be returned to the Christians at Antioch, the result of which deliberation appears to have been submitted to the whole church for their sanction. "Then pleased it the Apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch." And in the instrument transmitted to the Syrian churches, "the Apostles, elders, and brethren," are associated in the accustomed salutation, as a conjoint authority.

In the preceding chapter occurs a passage already adverted to, in which it is stated, that Paul and Barnabas, in re-visiting Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, "*ordained elders* in every "church." The word in this place translated ordain, intimates, it has been contended, the appointment by suffrage, as denoted by the lifting up of the hand, in contradistinction to the imposition of hands, which was the usual expression of the conveyance of official power: this, however, appears very doubtful. Nothing more is necessarily implied, than that they left these churches under the special superintendence of chosen elders; elders, in rank and age, the persons so appointed were previously, but now, the episcopacy of the assembly was solemnly committed to them, as the rulers of the Christian synagogue. These elders became, henceforth, the ultimate authorities in those churches: they were subject to no higher jurisdiction. Even the parent church, as it may be considered, at Antioch, from whence Paul and Barnabas had been originally sent forth on this special mission, was not at any period under the presidency of an Apostle, was not even founded by an Apostle. St. Paul could not possibly maintain an episcopal superintendence over their concerns; that "care of all the "churches," therefore, which he speaks of as daily devolving upon himself, could intend



only the deeply anxious and affectionate interest which he took in the spiritual prosperity of the churches which he had planted.

When St. Paul touched at Ephesus, in his way to Jerusalem, he sent for "the elders of the church," and in the solemn and pathetic address which he delivered to them in that interview, he expressly styles them the overseers or bishops of the flock, describing it as their office to "feed the Church of God," which clearly refers to their sustaining the capacity of teachers, if not the pastoral function. The passage must in all fairness be admitted to prove, that a plurality of elders or bishops, without, as it should seem, any distinction of rank, existed at that period in the Ephesian church, and that upon these elders devolved the episcopacy of the church, and the work of the ministry.

On his arrival at Jerusalem, Paul, together with those who had attended him, had a special interview with James, on which occasion, we are informed, "all the elders were present." This expression suggests the idea of a numerous assembly, and there can be little doubt, therefore, that in this case, as on the occasion before referred to, the senior members, or heads of families, are intended by the phrase. This is the last time the word *elders* occurs in the ecclesiastical history of the New Testament, and in no instance does it appear to be used as, strictly speaking, a term of office.

That the elders of Christian churches were, from the first, entrusted with the general superintendence of the assembly, is highly probable; in many cases, as for instance on the conversion of the whole or the major part of the members of a Jewish synagogue, the form of government was doubtless left undisturbed, and the same elders, perhaps, continued to preside over the Christian society, as had ruled the assembly before they had embraced the faith of Him of whom Moses and the Prophets had spoken. From the elders of the church, the bishops were usually chosen: we say usually, because, if Timothy was, as some have imagined, a bishop at the time that the Apostle Paul addressed to him his first Epistle, it is certain that he was not then, properly speaking, an elder. The case of Timothy, and that of Titus, must however be considered as altogether extraordinary. They were entrusted with a special commission, to which nothing either in the Jewish priesthood or in the synagogue government, presents an analogy. The presbytery of the synagogue was an authority of a local nature; but neither Timothy nor Titus appears to have been appointed to a local episcopacy.* Theirs

* On the contrary, it appears from the sacred records, that Timothy, by the direction of the Apostle Paul, superintended for a short time several churches in various places. Compare 1 Cor. iv. 17, 1 Tim. i. 3, and 1 Thess. iii. 2, which shew, that he was successively "sent" to Corinth, to Ephesus,

was "the work of an evangelist," a work not essentially different, it may be presumed, from that which Paul and Barnabas were sent forth from the church at Antioch to discharge. To this office, whatever it involved, Timothy, we are informed, was set apart by the imposition of the hands of the Presbytery; and as St. Paul, in his second Epistle, speaks of the gift of

and to Thessalonica, in the character of the adopted son and fellow-labourer of the Apostle. The Apocryphal subscription to the Second Epistle to Timothy, describes him as the first bishop of the church of the Ephesians. With more plausibility might he have been designated the Bishop of the church of the Corinthians, since in the First Epistle to that church, he is referred to, as being specially sent to them, as the representative of the Apostle, to bring them into remembrance of his ways and doctrines; and in the salutation prefixed to the Second Epistle, he is expressly associated with St. Paul as "Timothy our brother." Moreover, in the Epistles, which St. Paul wrote to the churches at Ephesus and Colosse, to the Hebrews and to Philemon, during his imprisonment at Rome, Timothy is mentioned as his companion. As to Titus, he was the Apostle's companion in his journey to Jerusalem. (Gal. ii. 1.) Subsequently to his being left for a short time at Crete, he was sent for by St. Paul to Ephesus, which he left for Corinth, and afterwards joined the Apostle in Macedonia. (2 Cor. vii. 6, 7.) Titus returned, with Silas, to Corinth, to prepare the church for contributing to the relief of the poor saints at Jerusalem. He was with Paul at Rome, and went thence, not to Crete, (his supposed diocese,) but unto Dalmatia (2 Tim. iv. 10). "Whether any do inquire of 'Titus,' writes St. Paul to the Corinthians, 'he is my 'partner and fellow-helper.'" See WHITBY'S *Preface* to his *Com. on Titus*.

God as having been communicated to Timothy by the imposition of his own hands, we are warranted in concluding that St. Paul himself, as one of that Presbytery, assisted in his ordination. In like manner, Paul and Barnabas were ordained to their mission, (the same ceremony of the solemn imposition of hands, accompanied with prayer, being employed,) by the prophets and teachers of the church at Antioch, of whom three, the number required in Jewish ordinations, are specially mentioned. That ordination was, unquestionably, not the source of St. Paul's Apostolic authority, nor did it constitute Barnabas an Apostle: it was simply a designation to a particular mission. It is equally evident, that it was not requisite that the rite of ordination should be performed by superiors in office, since an Apostle submitted to be ordained by those who cannot be considered as occupying a rank higher than that of Presbyters.* The right to ordain, attached

* "Why should the performance of ordination, which is
 "a lower office, exalt a prelate? Verily, neither the nature
 "nor example of ordination doth any way require an im-
 "parity between the ordainer and the ordained; for what
 "more natural than every like to produce his like, man to
 "beget man, fire to propagate fire? And in example of
 "highest opinion, the ordainer is inferior to the ordained;
 "for the pope is not made by the precedent pope, but by
 "cardinals, who ordain and consecrate to a higher and
 "greater office than their own." MILTON. "*Reason of*
 "*Church Government urged against Prelacy.*" B. I. C. iv.

alike, according to the Jewish customs, to every one who had himself been regularly ordained, and it was unquestionably vested in the presbyters of the primitive churches, previously to the rise of Diocesan Episcopacy. "Indeed," remarks the right reverend writer so often referred to, "were we to determine things by "importance of words, and things signified by "them, the power of ordination was proper to "the name *Presbyter*, and not *Bishop*, because "the former name did then import that power, "and not the latter."*

The custom of ordination was peculiar to the synagogue; for it is remarkable, that while the rulers or elders were ordained by the imposition of hands, the priests and Levites of the Ceremonial Law, were never instituted into their functions in this manner, but simply underwent an examination before the great Sanhedrim, as to the purity of their birth, and their freedom from corporal defects; after which, if approved,

* The learned Bishop, although he thinks that "this power "of ordination may be restrained by those who have the "care of the Church's peace," strenuously supports the lawfulness and validity of Presbyterian ordination; and he gives his deliberate opinion in favour of Medina's judgement, that "Jerome, Austin, Ambrose, Sédulius, Primasius, Chrysostome, Theodoret, and Theophylact, were all of Aërius's "judgement, as to the identity of both name and order of "Bishops and Presbyters in the primitive Church." See also the Confessions of the Romish Canonists themselves, and of Jerome, *Irenicum*, Pt. ii. Ch. vi. § 11.

they put on white raiment, and were admitted with great rejoicing into the Temple. To this custom our Saviour obviously alludes, in his address to the church at Sardis: "Thou hast a few
" names even in Sardis, which have not defiled
" their garments, and they shall walk with me in
" white, for they are worthy. He that overcom-
" eth, shall be clothed in white raiment." In this passage, we have another striking instance of the figurative application of the priestly character, so frequent in the New Testament, not to any office in the Christian Church, but to the individual Christian, as a priest unto God, constituted to offer up spiritual sacrifices, a consecrated person, belonging to a kingdom of priests. This metaphorical language serves strongly to expose the fallacy and the anti-scriptural nature of the hypothesis, that the ministers of the Gospel succeed, by way of correspondence or analogy, to the priests under the Law. This gross mistake, as Bishop Stillingfleet justly terms it, has been the foundation and original of many errors; "for when," as he remarks, "in the primitive Church, the name
" of priests came to be attributed to Gospel
" ministers, from a fair compliance (as was
" thought then) of the Christians, only to the
" names used both among Jews and Gentiles,
" in process of time, corruptions increasing in
" the Church, those names that were used by

“ the Christians by way of analogy and accom-
 “ modation, brought in the things themselves
 “ primarily intended by those names ;* so by the
 “ metaphorical names of priests and altars, at
 “ last came up the sacrifice of the mass, without

* Upon this mischievous fallacy, it might be shewn, rest the whole fabric of ecclesiastical rights, the Divine right of tithes, the power of benediction, and absolution, as well as that distinction of clergy and laity, which is in itself an error of no small practical importance, inasmuch as it involves the notion of a *mediatorial* order in the Church of Christ, analogous to the Jewish priesthood. To this notion is to be referred the power supposed to be inseparable from the Apostolic succession, of regenerating by baptism, of confirming, of absolving, and of ordaining to the like functions. A high-church writer, indeed, Mr. Law, does not scruple to declare that Christian priests “ *are left us in Christ’s stead, to carry on his great design of saving us ;*” a claim which Bishop Burnet justly stigmatizes as impious, opposing to the bold assertions of that writer, the reasonings of St. Paul, in the 5th, 7th, and following three chapters of the Epistle to the Hebrews, respecting the Jewish priesthood. The Bishop thus concludes his brief exposition of their contents: “ Having therefore boldness, every one of
 “ us, who is a Christian, (and therefore not to be frightened
 “ with the terrors, or outcries, or vain words of men) to enter
 “ into the holiest by the blood of Jesus (and not with any
 “ intervention necessary from other men,) by a new and liv-
 “ ing way which he hath consecrated for us, through the
 “ veil, that is to say, his flesh ; let us draw near with a true
 “ heart, in full assurance of faith. And let us not be driven
 “ from this, by any trifling pretences and dreams of men,
 “ or by threatenings from them, or even more real mischiefs
 “ they may be at any time able to bring upon us, for opposing

“ which they thought the names of priest and
 “ altars were insignificant. This mistake we
 “ see run all along through the writers of the
 “ Church, as soon as the name priests was ap-
 “ plied to the elders of the Church.” Thus,
 Isidore, Ivo, and Jerome roundly affirm, that
 High Priests, Priests and Levites, have a place
 in the Christian Church under the appellation
 of Bishops, Presbyters, and Deacons; the ab-
 surdity of which is the more glaring, from the
 consideration that, as there could be only
 one High Priest in the Levitical economy, the
 parallel must be sought for, not in the epis-
 copate, but in the *papacy*. It is not to be
 wondered at, that the Deacon, when these
 notions became prevalent, was transformed
 from an overseer of the poor, into a mere at-
 tendant on the Presbyters. Such a substitution
 of the terms and honours of a ceremonial priest-
 hood for the simplicity of the synagogue govern-
 ment, was not, in all probability, in accommo-
 dation to the prejudices of the Jews, (who, we
 may reasonably suppose, were equally attached
 to all their institutions,) so much as to those of
 the heathen converts, from whom, as Christ-

“ their enormous claims, and defending our Lord's prerogative,
 “ of being our sole High Priest, and Mediator with his Fa-
 “ ther.” Bp. BURNET's “ *Full Examination of several Points*
 “ *relating to Church Authority.*” 8vo. 1718. p. 100.

ianity began to spread, the most numerous accessions were made. It was in the estimation of the latter, more especially, that it presented such an appearance of unattractive poverty and meanness, as a religion destitute of temples, and altars, and a priesthood; and to meet this feeling, the Christian fathers had recourse to the fatal expedient of coining these false analogies, and setting up a priestly hierarchy and a pompous ritual. Is it to be wondered at, that the spirituality of Christianity, which constituted its true grandeur, should have been wholly lost by means of this unhallowed stratagem?*

The authority with which Timothy was invested, would seem to be of a nature not usually conferred upon persons so young as he was, which induced the Apostle to caution him against giving occasion to any person to "despise his youth." It was an authority very extensive, far exceeding the powers vested in the ruler of a synagogue, not only as regarded the local sphere of his jurisdiction, but inasmuch as even the episcopal elders of the churches, the formation of which was entrusted to him, appear to have been subordinated to his presidency. St. Paul exhorts him not to rebuke an elder, as by virtue of his office he

* Consult Mosheim. Second Century. Pt. II. Ch. iv.

might seem authorized to do, but to "intreat him " as a father;" and not to receive, in his judicial capacity, an accusation against an elder, except before two or three witnesses. Some, at least, of these elders, had "rule" in the Church; (not perhaps, that by that word we are to understand official authority, further than what naturally attached to the presidency of elders;) some also; and only some, "laboured in the "word and doctrine," on which account they were to be "especially counted worthy of "double honour,"—of honour as elders, of double honour, as elders ruling well and labouring in the ministry. The commission with which Timothy was charged, was clearly *archiepiscopal*, or, if we must employ modern phraseology, resembled the powers of a cardinal legate, or vicar apostolic. On the supposition, therefore, that it was not purely extraordinary and specific; but that it formed a precedent for an order of ecclesiastical governors superior to that of ordinary pastors, it must be an order as much superior to that of bishops, as that of bishops is held to be superior to that of deacons. And yet, dismissing our artificial notions of rank and office, the functions, the purely spiritual authority with which Timothy was invested, will be found to attach in reality to an office far below, in human estimation, the lordly prerogatives of Episco-

pacy,—an office not even comprehended in the hierarchy,—the office of the CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY.

The episcopacy of the primitive Christian societies, was, then, a local charge, strictly analogous, as it should seem, to that of the elders of the synagogue, as relating simply to the regulation of the public service of the Church, and the general superintendence of ecclesiastical affairs, but differing from the synagogue government, inasmuch as it comprehended no species of civil authority. There was nothing in the primitive episcopacy, that was adapted to operate as an incentive to ambition: it was not a source of wealth; it conferred no secular power. It is even probable, that it might appear to many, an office of unenviable labour and responsibility, and that, on this account, there might be a remissness on the part of those on whom it naturally devolved, to undertake its duties. Such a conjecture might seem to be warranted by the language of St. Peter, on one occasion, where, asserting his own authority as an elder, to exhort the elders of the Church, he charges them to “feed the flock of God,” which was among them, taking the oversight thereof, “not by *constraint*, but *willingly*; not “as being lords over God’s heritage, but as “being ensamples to the flock.” He urges it upon them as a most sacred duty, to take upon

themselves this charge, in order that the church might not be left without its natural guardians, the aged shepherds of the flock, and the sheep remain unfed. Perhaps the declaration of St. Paul, "If a man desireth the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work," is susceptible of a similar illustration. In times of persecution, to desire an office which exposed the individual to more than common danger, and brought with it no compensation of a secular nature, was a noble emulation. Some there might be, even then, who, like Diotrephes, were actuated by a mere love of pre-eminence. At the period, however, at which the Apostle addressed this epistle to Timothy, circumstances had scarcely rendered it an equivocal evidence of zeal, to desire the spiritual oversight of the church, in connexion with all the arduous duties of the pastoral office.

Origin of
the changes
in the go-
vernment of
the Church.

§ 12. How many elders there were originally in a church, and what were the precise nature and limit of the episcopal functions, it is impossible to ascertain. All that we know on this subject, from the New Testament, is, that their office was to "take care of the Church of God," to "feed the flock," to preside over it as a family. So long as the churches maintained their primitive purity, no occasion would be likely to arise, that should bring into question the extent of their authority, or call for any invidious ex-

ercise of their prerogative. That the primitive government of Christian churches, underwent, at a very early period, very material changes, is acknowledged on all sides. Upon this fact considerable stress has been laid by the advocates of Diocesan Episcopacy, under the idea that it vindicates, if not the Apostolic derivation, the next to Apostolic origin, and undoubted expediency of that form of ecclesiastical polity. How can we account, it is asked, for so early a departure from the Scriptural model as is involved, on these principles, in the rise of Episcopacy?

To this question it may be replied, in the first place, with the learned Bishop to whom we are under so great obligations, that there is reason to believe, that the Apostles did not themselves observe a fixed uniform rule in settling the government of the primitive churches, but adapted their course of proceeding to the circumstances of the persons with whom they had to deal.* The same reason that induced them, under certain circumstances, to adopt the form of the synagogue government, led them to prefer, under different circumstances, a form of government better suited to the national customs of their converts. Where the churches were small, the number of rulers would be proportionably few, the episcopacy being, there can be no doubt, in some instances confided to an indi-

* *Irenicum*,
Pt. III. Ch. vi.
§ 17.

vidual pastor; in others, vested in a consistory of elders answering to that of the synagogue. Of the existence of "a college of elders," as it is termed, acting in concert with the presiding pastor, or arch-presbyter, there are undoubted traces in the annals of the early ages: Ignatius terms the Presbyters, "the Sanhedrin of the Church." Other Fathers allude to them under the title of *clergy*: Jérôme speaks of them as the Senate or Common Council, by whom the church was governed. Eutychius remarks, that there were twelve presbyters who constituted the government of the Church at Alexandria. Dismissing, however, the doubtful testimony of the Fathers, there is nothing in the New Testament, to lead us to suppose that either the Pastoral, or the Presbyterian form of government was exclusively adhered to. On the contrary, St. Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians, would seem to warrant the conclusion, that in that church at least, there existed no order for the public service, and consequently no ordained elders or archi-synagogue. It is observable, that no officers of the church are specified in the opening salutation of either of the Epistles to this church; and that the Apostle, after reprobating their party spirit and their disorderly meetings, recommends them, towards the close of the first Epistle, to "submit themselves" to the house of Stephanus, who had

“addicted themselves to the ministry of the “saints,” intending, probably, to convey by this recommendation, the wish that they should elect Stephanus and his companions as the governors of the Church. The existence of prophets and teachers in particular churches, as at Antioch, and the distinct offices connected with miraculous gifts, necessarily produced some variations in the mode of government, although the general form might still be Presbyterian. In some cases, the Apostles and the Evangelists may be supposed to have exercised in person an episcopal presidency, which was probably devolved at their decease, or removal, on the senior Presbyter, as their successor. This, it may be said, is building upon conjecture; but the burden of proof rests with those who maintain the opposite opinion, that the Apostles did adhere to one settled plan, and that that prescribed form of government has Divine right in its favour; for if, in any one instance, there was a deviation from uniformity in the proceedings of the Apostles themselves, or, if the churches were allowedly left to frame their own regulations, independent of Apostolic directions, the positive duty and perpetual obligation of a stern adherence to certain forms, are disproved; and the departure from the original model ceases to excite that surprise which it occasioned when contemplated as a

direct infringement of Apostolic law. To those who are accustomed to attach superlative importance to the constitutional form of Christian churches, it may appear a notion bordering upon heterodoxy, that the New Testament, our only rule in matters of faith and practice, does not furnish specific directions in what is deemed by them so essential a particular.* Let

* Agreeably to this representation, is the assertion of MOSHEIM, that "Neither Christ himself, nor his holy Apostles, have commanded any thing clearly, or expressly, "concerning the external form of the Church, or the precise "method according to which it should be governed."—*Ecclesiastical History*, Cent i. Pt. ii. P. 97. That no form of Church government is prescribed by the Scriptures, is the admission of Archbishop WHITGIFT, the great defender of the English Hierarchy: nay, of KING JAMES himself. (See STILLINGFLEET'S *Irenicum*, Pt. ii. C. 8.) Bishop BURNET acknowledges, that even "The order of the clergy "does not appear from Scripture to be a positive institution, "in any manner, as the sacraments were. The appointing of "elders, by the Holy Ghost's immediate direction, to a "church, or congregation; or by the Apostles, who had the "infallible Spirit, which was the same thing; and their directing others to appoint elders in the several cities where "Christianity prevailed, is not a sufficient ground to go upon, "for calling the order of the clergy, a positive institution of "Christ; because it does not appear, that Christ gave any "directions about that matter; and because the Apostles "never mention it as such; but only as a prudential, proper, "and useful office; they never represent it as being of the "essence even of the Visible Church of Christ; and besides, "because it has been fully made out by the most learned

it, however, be remarked, that while the *form* of government is left thus indefinite and uncertain, the *principles* of ecclesiastical government are laid down in the Apostolic writings with the utmost clearness; principles invariable, common to every modification of outward circumstance, and which are all that the Divine wisdom has seen fit to render binding. Had these been adhered to, departures from the primitive model, which were in fact unavoidable, would have been attended by no evil results.

But, secondly, there are some considerations which may serve to shew, that a departure from the form, as well as the spirit of the primitive government of Christian societies, was naturally coincident with a declension in their religious character. If, even during the life of the Apostle John, the seven churches of Asia Minor had, with one exception, suffered so awful a declension in the latter respect, the early changes in ecclesiastical government might seem to afford little scope for wonder, as exhibiting a correspondent deterioration. Some slight modification of the original plan might originate in the simple circumstance of the ex-

"writers, to be entirely taken from the model of the Jewish
"synagogue, which, we are pretty sure, was not of Divine
"institution." "*Full Examination of several Important*
"*Points,*" &c. 1718. P. 109,

tension of Christian churches, and the consequent multiplication of elders. This, perhaps, gave rise to the election of the senior presbyter as moderator or chief ruler of the church, agreeably to the custom of appointing an archi-synagogue in the Jewish consistories;* the

* That the early introduction of a Presidency in the bench of Presbyters, had its rise in the custom of the synagogue, is the opinion of the learned M. BASNAGE, in his *History of the Jews*. (Book v. P. 408). Mr. Boyse gives the following extract:—"The government of the synagogues hath been often changed. In our Saviour's time they were regulated by a certain number of doctors. There were one or two persons set over these doctors. Dr. Lightfoot gives this title to three persons who were set over ten leaders. 'Tis also from thence that the Christian Church has taken its discipline. For in the beginning of every church, there was a certain number of Priests (or Presbyters) ordered, proportioned to the number of Christians. When the cities were as large as Jerusalem and Rome, they placed two bishops in them: but most of the Christian Churches had but one bishop, as most of the synagogues had but one head. There was no other difference put between *bishops* and *priests*, but that of presidency, which was given to age and merit. And, therefore, the names of bishops and priests are so often confounded in the gospel, as well as among the Jews. All the doctors that took care of the synagogue were of the same order, and held the same rank. In following this original discipline, which is natural, since the Jews, who are jealous of their rites, laid the first foundation and peopling of churches; 'tis easy to take off the objections against Episcopacy, which would become difficult, by following other principles."

adoption of which, there is reason to suppose, had become pretty general, when St. John addressed his Epistles to the angels of the Asiatic churches. This primacy of rank, as in the case of the Jewish precedent, involved at first no supremacy over the other Presbyters, nor did it denote any difference of office. Both the ruling and the ministerial functions devolved in common upon all the presbyters, and it was a long time before the title of bishop, became exclusively appropriated, as a term of superior dignity, to the chief elder.* Cyprian, who insists so much on the necessity of submission to

* "Such was the constitution of the Christian Church in its infancy, when its assemblies were neither numerous nor splendid. Three or four presbyters, men of remarkable piety and wisdom, ruled these small congregations in perfect harmony; nor did they stand in need of any president or superior to maintain concord and order where no dissensions were known. But the number of presbyters and deacons increasing with that of the churches, and the sacred work of the ministry growing more painful and weighty, by a number of additional duties, these new circumstances required new regulations. It was then judged necessary, that one man of distinguished gravity and wisdom should preside in the council of presbyters, in order to distribute among his colleagues their several tasks, and to be a centre of union to the whole society. This person was, at first, styled the *angel* of the church to which he belonged, but was afterwards distinguished by the name of *bishop*, or *inspector*."—*MOSHEIM'S Eccl. History*, by MACLAINE. Vol. I. P. 106.

the bishops, speaks repeatedly of his *compresbyters*. It is certain, that the bishop was not only chosen from the number of the presbyters, but for a long time, according to the testimony of Jerome, Eutychius and others, elected by them. The vestiges of this primitive right of election may be found within the church of Rome itself; the Pope or supreme Bishop being still elected by the Cardinal Presbyters. Thus, too, in the Anglican church, the shadow of elective right, vested in the dean and chapter, is perpetuated in the *Congé d'elire*. The original reason of instituting this office of presidency, we are expressly told by some ancient writers, was to prevent schisms, and to remedy the inconveniences of opposition or division among presbyters whose prerogatives were equal.* Agreeably to this representation, Cyprian distinguishes between *Presbytery* as "a law of Jesus Christ," and *Episcopacy* as "an act of God's special favour to the Church," it being deemed the means of preserving its unity.†

* Quod autem postea unus electus est qui cæteris præponeretur, in schismatis remedium factum est, ne unusquisque ad se trahens Christi ecclesiam rumperet. JEROME quoted by STILLINGFLEET.

† Quoniam subiectus est Episcopo ut gratiæ Dei, et presbyterio ut legi Jesu Christi. Archbishop USHER's *Version*. *Ibid*. "This difference between bishops and presbyters," says Dr. WHITAKER, (the learned defender of the Protestant cause,) remarking upon St. Jerome's confession

At first, nothing of importance was transacted by the bishop without the concurrence of his presbyters; but by degrees, and on various pretences, the Episcopal prerogative was rendered more and more exclusive and arbitrary. To this nothing tended more effectually to contribute, than dissensions among the presbyters, which, by elevating the bishop to the character of an umpire, gave him a species of judicial power, and rendered it an object with each party, to secure, by any compromise, his favourable decision. The indiscreet use of the right of ordination on the part of the presbyters, as tending to create schisms in the church, was eagerly seized as a pretext for restricting this prerogative, first to certain persons in the church, and ultimately to the bishop. Other circumstances, however, conspired still more powerfully to consolidate the Episcopal supremacy.

When once the government of Christian societies became ultimately vested in a president, or archpresbyter, and the idea of a supreme authority resident in one chosen officer, was

that it was brought in as a remedy against Schism, "is a remedy almost worse than the disease, *for it begat and brought in the Pope* with his monarchy into the Church." See WHITAKER *de Eccl. Regim.* Contr. 4. Q. 1. § 29. p. 540. (Quoted by BOYSE, *Works*, fol. Vol. 2. p. 153).

identified with the preservation of Christian unity, it was the natural progress of opinion, that under the pretence of rendering this unity still more comprehensive, the episcopal presidency should be so extended as to comprise within its jurisdiction larger and larger portions of Christian society. A new and dangerous sphere of emulation was now opened to the rulers of Christ's kingdom.* The superior dignity of the bishop came to be dependent on the number of the presbyters over whom he presided, as arising from the extent and importance of the seat of his episcopacy. This gave rise to a correspondent change of phraseology. The presbyters of the Christian synagogues were now supposed to rank more appropriately with elders of the Sanhedrim, of which the bishop, disdaining the humble parallel of the archi-synagogue, was esteemed to represent the Nasi, or Prince. The Levitical analogy was an after-thought. The unity of the Church of Christ having now come to be considered as consisting in unity of government, the word Church itself became henceforth technically significant of whatever fell under the jurisdiction of one supreme ecclesiastical ruler. Whensoever churches were formed in the vil-

* "The enlarging of dioceses," remarks Bishop BURNET, "has altered the whole figure of Primitive Episcopacy."—*Vindication of the Church of Scotland*. P. 56.

lages and territories adjoining to a city in which a bishop presided, these were considered as coming under the presidency of the city church, and consequently under the rule of its bishop. This was the origin of Diocesan Episcopacy. It was but a step further to subordinate associated churches throughout a province, still under the notion of consolidating its unity, to a Metropolitan or Patriarch. At length, to complete the progress of ecclesiastical ambition, the universal company of metropolitans, archbishops, patriarchs, and ex-archs, was summed up in the unity of the Popedom.* In the New Testament, we read of the church at Jerusalem, the church at Philippi, the

* "At first," remarks the learned Dr. BARROW, "every church was settled apart under its own bishops and presbyters; so as independently and separately to manage its own concerns; each was governed by its own head, and had its own laws." "The metropolitical governance," he adds, "was introduced, by *human prudence* following considerations of public necessity or utility:" and he shews, that it was by the moulding of the ecclesiastical government in a conformity to the civil, that the power of metropolitans, primates, patriarchs, and at length, the papacy, successively originated. "There are, indeed, some," he remarks, "who think it (the metropolitical government) was instituted by the Apostles; but their arguments do not seem convincing; and such a constitution doth not, (as I take it) well suit to the state of their times, and the course which they took in founding churches." *Treatise of the Pope's Supremacy*. WORKS. Vol. I. P. 662.

church at Antioch. Ecclesiastical history introduces us first to diocesan churches, then to provincial churches, then to national churches, the ecclesiastical government being still *contempered*, as Bishop Stillingfleet terms it, to the civil, till we are at length conducted to the two grand divisions of ecclesiastical empire, the Eastern and the Western Churches, and to the perfection of the hypothesis of unity in the pretensions of the Church of Rome.

It is not, as has been remarked, the mere change in the form and titles of government, consequent upon the rise of Diocesan Episcopacy, that marks the corruption of Christianity; but words are the signs of things, and a change of name is generally indicative of some internal alteration that has already taken place. The circumstances in which the outward modifications of the primitive ecclesiastical government originated, of necessity affected the character of Christian societies, and those circumstances must have been for some time in operation, before the nominal changes, for which they prepared the way, were ripe for general adoption. Thus, in the substitution of analogical terms, borrowed from the Levitical priesthood, for those of the synagogue government, we may detect an unequivocal symptom of a spirit having begun to infect the Christian ministry, wholly opposite to the genius of the religion of

Christ. In the adoption of terms borrowed from the Roman government, we may in like manner trace the consequences of an influx of nominal converts from the Gentile nations, whose prejudices and notions of authority, seemed to require a different adaptation of ecclesiastical phraseology. As it was in accommodation to the heathen, rather than to the Jewish converts, that terms borrowed from a ceremonial priesthood were first brought into the Christian Church; so, it may safely be presumed, that it was also in consequence of the growing ascendancy, in point of numbers, of the former, that the monarchical form of government so soon began to displace that of the primitive presbytery, and that the simple term *Episcopus*, which to a Jew must have been far less significant and dignified than that of Elder, came to be exclusively appropriated, as expressive of pre-eminence, to the highest order in the ministry. Originally, the word imported duty rather than honour, not being exclusively appropriated, among the Greeks and Romans,* to any very exalted office. When the Apostle Paul wrote his Epistle to the Philippians, under the high sound-

* "Les Athéniens donnoient ce nom au Président de la justice, et le Digeste donne la même qualité aux magistrats qui ont l'inspection sur le marché au pain, et d'autres choses de cette nature." CALMET's *Dictionary*. Article, *Evêque*.

ing titles of bishops and deacons, he probably conveyed no other idea than would now be suggested by a literal version of his salutation: "Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, together with the overseers and ministers." Yet, strange to say, in process of time a Christian bishop came to signify the lord paramount of an extensive territory, a temporal prince, enthroned amid all the insignia of worldly dignity, and holding a judicial empire over the property, and even the lives of vast portions of mankind! Our Lord's declaration, in reference to the lordship exercised by Gentile princes—"It shall not be so among you," can be reconciled with this fact, only by concluding that with the church of which He spake, the kingdom to which he referred, the bishops of ecclesiastical history had no connexion.

On the rise
of Ecclesi-
astical
power.

§ 13. In order to account for the rise and rapid maturity of ecclesiastical power, we must bear in mind, that the principles of civil liberty and of individual right, were at that period very imperfectly understood. It was no uncommon thing, even in the days of the Apostles, for some of the Christian converts to fall into the mistake, that they were, in consequence of their admission into the church, discharged from their former political obligations, and brought under a new and distinct species of

magisterial jurisdiction. The Apostle Paul labours to guard the Roman Christians against this dangerous error, and he takes frequent occasion in his Epistles, to shew that Christianity was not designed to interfere in any way with the political relations of society. In writing to the Corinthians, he has occasion to combat this error, in a different shape, on account of the disposition manifested by some of the members of that church, to attach themselves, in the slavish spirit of party, to a favourite leader: "Ye suffer a man to bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take of you, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face."* It appears, that even at that early period, the spirit of ecclesiastical domination, to which allusion still more express and emphatic occurs in the second Epistle to the Thessalonians, had begun to work, and had found in the carnal passions and party spirit of the Corinthian disciples, its ready instruments. • 2 Cor. xj, 20.

The growth of Episcopal power is not, however, altogether attributable to ambitious design on the part of those by whom it was first exercised. So far from this, the effect, as Dr. Campbell has remarked, "is much more justly ascribed to their virtues."* How paradoxical

* "There is nothing which men are not ready to yield to distinguished merit, especially when matters are in that state wherein every kind of pre-eminence, instead of pro-

soever this may sound, it is difficult to account in any other way for the unopposed ascendancy which was so soon obtained by men whose ambition, had it betrayed itself when as yet unarmed by wealth or power, required but to be withstood, in order to be rendered harmless. That deference was, however, lavishly conceded to personal character, from a principle of veneration and unbounded confidence, which it would have been next to impossible openly

“ curing wealth and secular advantages, exposes but to danger and to greater suffering. Even the small distinction of being accounted the first in the society, and, as it were, the senior brother among the pastors, would be a strong incitement to a faithful and zealous minister to distinguish himself by being the first also in every difficulty and in every danger. This would beget in the people a more implicit deference to his judgement, and respect to his person. A deference at first merely paid to virtue, comes at last, though the gradual operation of habit, to be considered as due to office. What was gratuitously bestowed on the meritorious predecessor, is claimed by the underserving successor, as a right. And the very principles of our nature tend to favour the claim. But when ease and affluence succeed to danger and distress, then indeed ambition on the one side, and dependence on the other, will be able to secure what virtue alone could earn. Such is the ordinary progress of human things. Similar to this, if traced backwards, will be found the origin of almost all the governments that are not founded on conquest.”—*CAMPBELL'S Lectures on Ecclesiastical History*. Vol. I. Sect. 6.

to wrest from people roused to a jealous sense of their rights.

The manner in which the Episcopal power was, by successive grants and successive encroachments, enlarged to so formidable a magnitude, are not however left to the uncertain deductions of speculation. The distinct steps may be traced by which it ultimately reached a height which enabled it absolutely to overshadow the secular authorities. From the writings of Fra Paolo Sarpi, the celebrated historian of the Council of Trent, Principal Campbell has drawn materials for a succinct and luminous sketch, contained in his third Lecture, of the origin and progress of this wonderful usurpation, up to the point of its consummation, when all church power came to centre in the Roman Pontiff.*

* The learned Dr. Isaac Barrow, in the Treatise before cited, "Of the Pope's Supremacy," offers, in a series of profound remarks, a solution of the problem, "By what ways and means so groundless a claim and pretence should gain belief and submission to it, from so considerable a part of Christendom;" or, as he otherwise expresses it, how "from so very slender roots, this bulk of exorbitant power (the papacy) did grow." The whole series of causes alleged to have concurred and contributed to this result, would, if transcribed, swell this note to a disproportionate length. The following are all that bear immediately upon our subject. In the Treatise itself, some of them are considerably amplified:—

" 1. Eminency of any kind (in wealth, in honour, in re-

One other circumstance deserves to be adverted to, as having concurred in producing

“putation, in might, in place, or mere order of dignity,) doth
 “easily pass into advantages of real power and command
 “over those who are inferior in those respects, and have any
 “dealings or common transactions with such superiors. For
 “to persons endowed with such eminency, by voluntary deference the conduct of affairs is wont to be allowed; none
 “presuming to stand in competition with them, every one
 “rather yielding place to them than to their equals. Then
 “from a custom of managing things doth spring up an opinion or a pretence of right thereto; they are apt to assume a title, and others ready to allow it. Men naturally
 “do admire such things; and so are apt to defer extraordinary respect to the possessors of them.

“2. Any small power is apt to grow and spread itself.
 “Encroaching (as Plutarch saith) is the innate disease of potentacies. The first chief was a leader of volunteers.

“3. Spiritual power, especially, is of a growing nature, and more especially that which deriveth from Divine institution, for it hath a great awe upon the hearts and consciences of men. It useth the most subtle arms, which it hath always ready, which needeth no time or cost to furnish, which cannot be extorted from its hand; so that it can never be disarmed.

“4. Power is easily attained and augmented upon occasion of dissensions.

“5. All power is attended by dependencies of persons sheltered under it, and by it enjoying subordinate advantages; the which proportionably do grow by its increase.

“6. Hence, if a potentate himself should have no ambition, nor much ability to improve his power; yet it would

the destruction of the spiritual character of Christian societies; namely, the degraded state

“ of itself grow, he need only be passive therein ; the interest
 “ of his partizans would effect it.

“ 7. Even persons otherwise just and good do seldom
 “ scruple to augment their power by undue encroachment,
 “ or at least to uphold the usurpations of their predecessors ;
 “ for even such are apt to favour their own pretences, and
 “ afraid of incurring censure and blame, if they should part
 “ with any thing left them by their predecessors.

“ 8. Men of an inferior condition are apt to express them-
 “ selves highly in commendation of those who are in a su-
 “ perior rank, which commendations are liable to be inter-
 “ preted for acknowledgments or attestations of right, and
 “ thence do sometimes prove means of creating it.

“ 9. Good men commonly, (out of charitable simplicity,
 “ meekness, modesty and humility, love of peace and averse-
 “ ness from contention,) are apt to yield to the encroach-
 “ ments of those who any wise do excel them ; and when
 “ such men do yield, others are ready to follow their ex-
 “ ample. Bad men have little interest to resist, and no heart
 “ to stand for public good ; but rather strike in presently,
 “ taking advantage by their compliance, to drive a good
 “ market for themselves.

“ 10. If in such cases a few wise men do apprehend the con-
 “ sequences of things, yet they can do little to prevent them.
 “ They seldom have the courage with sufficient zeal to
 “ bustle against encroachments ; fearing to be overthrown by
 “ its stream, to lose their labour, and vainly to suffer by it.

“ 11. There is a strange enchantment in words ; which
 “ being (although with no great colour of reason) assumed,
 “ do work on the fancies of men, especially of the weaker
 “ sorts. Of these power doth ever arrogate to itself such as

of ignorance and superstition into which the people at large had sunk, owing to the deficiency of intelligent instructors, and the almost total failure of an evangelical ministry. "Ye are the salt of the earth," said our Lord to his disciples, "but if the salt has lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted?" "Ye are the light of the world;"—but when the lights of the world were darkness, how great was that darkness! When the lust of empire led the rulers of the church to regard men as the subjects of ecclesiastical jurisdiction, rather than as the subjects of the gospel ministry; when it became their object, not to convert the souls, but only to change the creeds of men,—not to bring sinners to Christ, but Pagans to the font; it mattered not to them how ignorant, how debased were the flocks of which they had assumed the pastorship, so long as they kept within the fold of their jurisdiction; nor with

"are most operative, by their force sustaining and extending itself.

"12. All princes are forward to heap honour on the bishop of their imperial city: it seeming a disgrace to themselves, that so near a relation should be an inferior to any other; who is, as it were, their spiritual pastor, who is usually by their special favour advanced. The city and the court will be restless in assisting him to climb."—*Treatise of the Pope's Supremacy*. WORKS. Vol. I, pp. 669-674.

what they were fed, so that the desire of better instruction was extinguished. The neglect of the Scriptures on the part of the clergy, was followed, as a necessary means of security, by forbidding them to the laity; and now the darkness was complete! Power was the blind monarch that ruled the powerless blind. The moral world suffered an awful eclipse, during which it may be appropriately affirmed, in the language of prophecy, "The sun and the moon were darkened, and the stars withdrew their shining.*

* Joel iii. 15.

§ 14. The primitive Christian churches, then, according to the representation it has been attempted to substantiate, were voluntary societies, altogether spiritual in their nature, independent of the secular power, subsisting by its bare permission, and presenting, in many other points, a striking conformity to the Jewish synagogues. In these several respects, the churches of the Protestant Dissenters, must be allowed to exhibit, both in their form and their external circumstances, a close approximation to the primitive societies. Whatever opinion may be maintained as to the grounds of their adherence to the Scriptural model, this simple fact cannot be set aside. It is readily admitted, that in some subordinate details of ecclesiastical government, the correspondence may be imperfect; that Dissenting

On the Pastoral relation.

controvertists, in attempting to make good every ramification of their system, have occupied positions hazardous, if not untenable; and that Divine right and Scriptural law have been, on all sides, too eagerly pressed into the service of hypothesis. An instance of this occurs in the stress injudiciously laid upon those precedents in the New Testament, which are usually held to be in favour of the right of the people to elect their own pastors.* The truth is, that the circumstances attending the formation of many of the primitive churches, did not allow of such a right being called into exercise. The purely democratical nature of the primitive churches, is another point which Scripture precedent has been too hastily adduced to substantiate. The first Christians, it has been forgotten, were Jews, who, exceedingly attached to their own institutions, and utterly unaccustomed to democratical forms of government, carried into the Christian Church no higher notions of liberty than adhered to them as Jews; they still looked to be governed by their presbyters; nor is it probable that the Apostles,

* Nevertheless, that the ordination of pastors by the Apostles, never took place without the consent of the people, is the admission of some of the most learned Episcopal writers. See Dr. BARROW'S Treatise before referred to, (*Works*, vol. I. p. 171) where he cites the words of Clemens Romanus—"the whole church consenting"—in proof of this remark.

being themselves Jews, should have introduced any form of polity foreign to their national habits. With the Gentiles the case was different, and they were doubtless left, in like manner, to follow up their accustomed notions of order and government, in the constitution and management of the respective Christian societies into which they were distributed. For the very same reason that the Jewish converts would not adopt the forms of a pure democracy, we, in modern times, and in a free country, should find it a chimerical scheme, to attempt the revival of that strictly Presbyterian discipline, in which age claimed so authoritative a pre-eminence, but which was familiar to the subjects of the Theocracy. Neither of these points, however, is involved in the grounds of Nonconformity, nor is the determination of these and other minor points which have employed the acuteness of logical opponents, essential to the maintenance of that fundamental principle of the constitution of congregational churches, the voluntary and spiritual nature of Christian societies. This being once admitted, the right of every one to choose his own minister, as well as the necessarily democratic character of voluntary societies, may be vindicated by general reasonings.

With regard to the former, in particular, it may be argued, that the nature of the pastoral

relation is such, that no individual can be brought under its authority in any other way than by his own spontaneous consent; that wheresoever the right of election, in respect to ecclesiastical appointments, may be deposited, nothing can supersede that act of choice on the part of the individual, which it enters into his religious duty to exercise. Again: the connexion between a pastor and his flock being of a purely moral nature, and not either a natural or a political relation, it must needs be the result of reciprocal consent and choice: it cannot, for any spiritual purposes, originate in the decisions of a foreign authority. Whatever be the ostensible source of a minister's official claims, as regards his appointment by man, (and into this individuals may not feel themselves concerned to examine,) of his character, his conduct, his doctrine, they are commanded to take account, to bring them to the test of "the law and the testimony." We are to "try the spirits whether they are of God;" to "search the Scriptures, whether the things declared unto us are so;" to "beware of false prophets." These are duties of personal and universal obligation, and, upon these considerations rest both the validity and the importance of the right for which we contend, as arising out of the very nature of the obli-

gation.* Opposed to this, there can exist no right in another man, that interferes with the free exercise of mine. No man can either have an inherent natural right, or derive from the civil authority a political right, to be received by an individual, or by a body of individuals, in the capacity of a spiritual instructor. His claim to be so received, must be of a moral nature, must arise from his qualifications and character; the corresponding obligation must likewise be moral and not political; but, in the discharge of a moral obligation, there are necessarily involved, an intelligent recognition of the claim which constitutes the ground of the requirement, a competency to judge of its validity, and a consequent voluntary act of obedience to the Divine Authority by which moral obligations are enforced. To receive a man in the character of a teacher, without examining his claims, without, in other words,

* "In reason, the nature of any spiritual office consisting
 "in instruction in truth, and guidance in virtue toward
 "attainment of salvation; if any man doth lead into pernicious error, or impiety, he thereby ceaseth to be capable of such office: as a blind man, by being so, doth
 "cease to be a guide. No man can be bound to follow any
 "one into the ditch, or to obey any one in prejudice to his
 "own salvation. If any pastor should teach bad doctrine,
 "or prescribe bad practice, his people may reject and disobey him." *BARROW'S Works*. Vol. I. p. 744.

making our reception of him in that character, depend upon the truths which he preaches, is an act of implicit faith or submission wholly unauthorized by the Gospel, and infinitely perilous. Implicit faith has no other legitimate object, than the Divine testimony; and, when transferred to human authority, whether it be that of a Pope or a Presbyter, a national church or an individual teacher, it not only becomes irrational, but precludes the proper exercise of the principle of religious obedience. Human testimony is, in many cases, the only means by which we discover truth, but it never can constitute the evidence of moral truth, or, in respect to that species of knowledge, the basis of certainty; it can never, therefore, be the ultimate source of religious belief.

This natural right of every Christian to choose his spiritual instructor, attached to every individual member of the primitive churches, not less than to Christians in the present day, and the voluntary nature of the association by which they were held together, prevented any infringement of this right; but, as has been remarked, there did not then exist the same occasion for its exercise. There was not, in the first place, the same diversity of doctrine in the Church of Christ, as now imposes upon every Christian the necessity of discriminating between truth and error. There were, indeed,

false teachers even in those times, against whom the disciples were exhorted to be on their guard; but heresy was at that period a more evident, and a more wilful thing than it is now, inasmuch as there did not exist so much room for involuntary mistake. The Gospel of Jesus Christ was, for the most part, either received as a whole, and preached in simplicity from a deep feeling of its truth and Divine excellency; or it was altogether rejected and contemned. The character of Christian ministers was, moreover, frequently attested by sanctions which left no room for hesitation as to receiving them in that capacity. And in the case of Apostolic appointment, the right of choice, on the part of the members of a church, over which the ordination of a pastor took place under these circumstances, was as really exercised in the act of ready submission to the authority of those inspired servants of Christ, as if the election had originated in their undirected decision. So long as a society remains in its constitution a voluntary society, wheresoever the actual power of appointment rests, whether in an individual, or in the elders of the congregation, or in a majority, there must frequently take place a compromise of choice on the part of some, a surrender, to a certain extent, of individual preference; but that surrender being, from the

nature of the society, purely voluntary, the right of choice is not only preserved inviolate, but is substantially exercised by every member of the community. In order, however, to render that submission reasonable, there must be a conviction of the legitimacy and the propriety of the appointment; there must be moral reasons for acquiescing, all things considered, in the decision on which it rests; and this acquiescence must really take place in the mind of every individual before he can receive the person so appointed, in the capacity of a Christian pastor.

The reason that a minister is appointed to a particular station, may not be, indeed, the precise reason for my attaching myself to his ministry. The appointment may originate in an authority which I do not recognise, or under circumstances of which I disapprove, and yet the individual chosen may be the object of my affectionate attachment. The choice may be good, although the right of nomination should be questionable. The only adequate reason, however, for the appointment of a Christian minister to a specific charge, is the general concurrence of the people in desiring him to be their pastor. The power of appointing, wheresoever it is vested, does not include in itself a reason for the particular act of appointment; still less does the circumstance of a person's being no-

minated by another to a station which confers certain political advantages, constitute any reason for my submitting to receive him in a pastoral capacity. That is an act in which I must be guided by far different considerations.

The strongest reason for an appointment of this responsible nature, as well as the most impressive consideration that can influence individual choice, is conveyed in that pathetic appeal of the Apostle to the Corinthian Church: "For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel. Wherefore, I beseech you, be ye followers of me."* The pastors of many of the primitive churches, had no doubt been instrumental in gathering from among the heathen, by the preaching of Christ, the members of which those churches were composed; and this circumstance conferred the highest claim to the legitimate authority of the pastorship. Under the present circumstances of Christianized society, the pastoral relation cannot, as respects collective bodies of believers, originate in such a claim; but that which gives it emphasis, that which forms the strongest mutual tie, is the individual's being indebted for his conversion from the world, to the instrumentality of the man whom he is called upon to receive as his instructor in Christ. Appoint-

* 1 Cor. iv.
15.

ments determinable by collective bodies, must be subject to considerations which do not bear upon the question of individual duty ; but in both cases, as respects the appointment or reception of a man in a capacity so purely spiritual, the grand point to be ascertained must alike be, his being possessed of those moral qualifications which commend themselves to the conscience and the heart.

On Ordination.

§ 15. Where, then, it may be asked, resides the *right*, or power, and in what consists the importance of *Ordination*? It is not the source of ministerial authority, for that, as it has been endeavoured to shew, does not, and cannot, rest on any human foundation. It does not admit to the pastoral office ; for even in the Episcopal Church, the title to office, which is an indispensable pre-requisite, is derived from the nomination of the person who has the disposal of the cure. It is not office, but official character, which Episcopal ordination is supposed to convey, together with whatsoever the advocates of Episcopacy may choose to understand by those solemn words, used by the ordaining bishop, (an application of them which Nonconformists deem awfully inappropriate) “Receive the Holy Ghost.” The Jewish ordination, on the contrary, although sometimes accompanied, when administered by the Apostles, by the communication of miraculous gifts,

was in itself no more than a significant form of benediction on admission to a specific appointment. Of this nature were the offices connected with the synagogue, in contradistinction from those of the priesthood. When Paul and Barnabas were sent out from the church at Antioch, they submitted to the same impressive ceremony: not surely that either authority, or power of any kind, or miraculous qualifications, devolved upon the Apostle and his illustrious companion, by virtue of the imposition of Presbyterian hands! What then is Ordination? The answer is, a decent and becoming solemnity, adopted from the Jewish customs by the primitive church, significant of the separation of an individual to some specific appointment in the Christian ministry, and constituting both a recognition on the part of the officiating presbyters, of the ministerial character of the person appointed, and a desirable sanction of the proceedings of the church. It is, however, something more than a mere circumstance, the imposition of hands being designed to express that fervent benediction which accompanied the ceremony, and which constitutes the true spirit of the rite. To an occasion which, when the awful responsibility of the pastoral charge is adequately felt, imparts to the prayers and the affectionate aid of those who are fathers and brethren in the ministry, a more

especial value, the sign and solemn act of benediction must appear peculiarly appropriate. This venerable ceremony may also be regarded as a sort of bond of fellowship among the churches of Christ, a sign of unity, and an act of brotherhood.

Repugnant as this view of Ordination is to the modern advocates of Episcopacy, the sentiments of Archbishop Cranmer, and the first Protestant bishops of the Church of England, were not widely different. The following extract from a highly interesting document, contains the answer of the venerable prelate himself, to certain questions propounded to a select assembly at Windsor Castle, in the reign of Edward the Sixth.

Cranmer's
declaration
respecting
Ordination,
&c.

“ In the admission of many of these of-
“ ficers (civil ministers and ministers of God’s
“ word) bee divers comely ceremonies and so-
“ lemnities used, which be not of necessity,
“ but only for a goodly order and semely fash-
“ ion. For if such offices and ministrations
“ were committed without such solemnitye, thei
“ were nevertheles truely committed. And
“ there is no more promise of God, that grace
“ is given in the committing of the ecclesiasti-
“ cal office, then it is in the committing of the
“ cyvile. In the Apostles time, when there was
“ no Christien princes by whose authority mini-
“ sters of God’s word might be appointed, nor

“ synnes by the sword corrected ; there was no
“ remedy then for the correction of vice or ap-
“ pointinge of ministers, but only the consent
“ of Christien multitude amonge themselfe,
“ by an uniform consent to follow the advice
“ and perswasion of such persons whom God
“ had most endued with the spirit of wisdom
“ and counsaile. And at that time, for as
“ much as Christien people had no sword nor
“ governour among them, thei were constrained
“ of necessity to take such curates and priests,
“ as either they knew themselves to be meet
“ thereunto, or else as were commended unto
“ them by other, that were so replete with
“ the Spirit of God, with such knowledge in
“ the profession of Christ, such wisdom, such
“ conversation and councell, that they ought
“ even of very conscience to give credit unto
“ them, and to accept such as by theym were
“ presented. And so some tyme the Apostles
“ and other unto whom God had given abun-
“ dantly his Spirit, sent or appointed ministers
“ of God’s word, sometime the people did chose
“ such as they thought meet thereunto. And
“ when any were appointed or sent by the Apo-
“ stles or other, the people of their owne volun-
“ tary will with thanks did accept them ; not
“ for the supremitie, imperie, or dominion, that
“ the Apostells had over them to command
“ as their princes, or masters : but as good

“ people, ready to obey the advice of good
 “ counsellors, and to accept any thing that was
 “ necessary for their edification and benefit.

“ The bishops and priests were at one time,
 “ and were not two things, but both one office,
 “ in the beginning of Christ’s religion.*

* *Id temporis idem erat Episcopus, Sacerdos, Presbyter* ; are the words of JEROME. That this was, indeed, the current doctrine of the principal instruments of the English Reformation, in the reigns of Henry VIII. Edward VI. and Elizabeth, is a fact incontrovertible. The learned JOSEPH BOYSE, of Dublin, in the Postscript to his Vindication of “ Remarks on the Bishop of Derry’s Discourse,” has collected together a mass of evidence on this point, of which the following is a brief summary. The testimonies of TYNDAL, LAMBERT, and BARNES, who sealed the reformed faith with their blood, are extant in the “ *Healing Attempt*.” They are to the following effect: that “ there were but now two officers “ of Divine institution in the Church, *viz.* elders or bishops to “ feed the flock, and deacons to minister the charity of the “ church to the poor and needy.” In “ A Declaration made “ of the Functions and Divine Institution of Bishops and “ Priests,” issued in the reign of Henry VIII. and subscribed (A. D. 1537, or 1538) by Thomas Cromwell, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, eleven bishops, and many other doctors and civilians, it is asserted, “ That in the New “ Testament there is no mention made of any degrees or distinctions in orders, but only of deacons or ministers, and of “ priests or bishops.” The same declaration occurs in the book called “ The Erudition of a Christian Man, composed “ by the Ecclesiastical Committees appointed by the King, “ and published by royal authority, A. D. 1540.” It is stated in conclusion, that it is “ *expedient* and *necessary*, that all

“ A bishop may make a priest by the Scriptures, and so may princes and governors

“ men should be advertised and taught, that all such lawful authority and power of one bishop over another, were and be given them by consent, ordinance, and positive laws of men only; and not by any ordinance of God, in holy Scripture.” (See BURNET’s *History of the Reformation*, Part I. p. 366). St. JEROME’s opinion, “that the Scriptural bishop and presbyter were the same in office as well as name,” is expressly approved by Bishop ALLEY, in the reign of Q. Elizabeth; (*Poor Man’s Library*, Tom. I. page 95–6, and Tom. II. p. 16.) and by Bishop PILKINGTON, (*Healing Attempt*, p. 16). It is vindicated more at large by Bishop JEWEL in the defence of his “Apology,” against *Harding*; in which he cites ST. AUSTIN, ST. CHRYSOSTOM, and ST. AMBROSE, as additional testimonies in favour of the identity of the order of bishop and priest. The same sentiment is defended by Dr. WILLET, another famous writer of the same reign, in his *Synopsis Papismi*; by Bishop MORTON, in his *Apologia Cath*; by Dr. WHITAKER, as cited above; by Dr. LAURENCE HUMPHREY, in his work against *Campanian*, the jesuit; and, lastly, by another Oxford divine, Dr. HOLLAND, who delivered the same doctrine in the act, July 9, 1608, in which “he concluded the contrary opinion to be most false against the Scriptures, the Fathers, and the doctrine of the Church of England. And he was so offended with Dr. Laud for his asserting, in his disputation for his degrees, that ‘Episcopacy as a distinct order from Presbytery, was of Divine and necessary right,’ that he told him, ‘He was a Schismatick, and went about to make a division between the English and other Reformed Churches.’” To these it is scarcely necessary to add, the judgement of Archbishop USHER. See BOYSE’s *Works*, folio. Vol. II. pp. 149–153.

“ alsoe, and that by the auctory of God committed to them, and the people alsoe by their election. For as we reade that bishops have done it, so Christien emperors and princes usually have done it. And the people before Christien princes were, commonly did elect their bishops and priests.

“ In the New Testament, he that is appointed to be a bishop or a priest, needeth no consecration by the Scripture ; for election or appointing thereto is sufficient.”*

Recapitulation.

Such was the decision of the founders of our present Establishment—a decision embodying some of the main positions laid down by Nonconformist writers, and which ought, one would imagine, to have some effect in moderating the confidence of their polemical adversaries. The principles of Nonconformity, as respects the constitution of Christian churches, are briefly these: the purely voluntary nature of religious union; the necessary independence of societies so originating; the spirituality of the objects they are exclusively designed to promote; the moral nature of the authority to which they are subject, as opposed to all admixture of secular power; and, finally, the unalienable right vested

* See a transcript of the whole of the original, which was subscribed with Cranmer's own hand, in Bishop STILLINGFLEET's *Irenicum*, Part II. ch. vii. § 2. See also BURNET's *History of the Reformation*.

in every such society to choose its spiritual pastors and teachers. It only remains to examine more particularly into the laws which relate to the discipline of societies established upon these principles.

CHAP. IV.

On Discipline.

Peculiar
view of the
human be-
ing exhibit-
ed by differ-
ent sciences.

§ 1. **N**OTHING is more remarkable than the very different associations which the same objects awaken in the minds of individuals whose habits of thinking have been formed by associations of a dissimilar nature. Let an abstract truth of pure science be proposed to the mechanical philosopher, the chemist, and the physiologist; if they arrive at the same conclusions respecting it, it will probably be through a course of ideas, and by the help of figures and abstractions extremely different; a difference which will frequently affect the identity of their conclusions. But let an object not of pure science, the matter of familiar observation, be presented to them, and it is very possible, that in the ideas respectively suggested by it, there will be very little in common; the attention of each will instinctively select those qualities or circumstances attaching to it, which fall within the scope of his most familiar habits of thinking.

Let, for example, the subject be Man,—a

subject common to almost all science and all philosophy, as comprising that with which, in some reference or other, they are principally conversant. It is evident, that no view can be taken of the human being, that shall include all that belongs to the complex wonders of his nature. One class of phenomena is selected by one science; a distinct order of facts is appropriated to another; in a third, the pursuit of knowledge is directed to properties of a still different kind; and these several physical, moral, or political views under which men may be contemplated, are susceptible of subdivisions, and modifications, under each of which the attention is fixed upon the object under some peculiar aspect, to the exclusion of all ideas not connected with the particular inquiry. And when the attention has been so long habituated to this particular direction, that it has become the most natural and familiar point of view in which an object can present itself, the person insensibly acquires a mode of thinking, and an intellectual character, bearing in some degree the impress of his favourite pursuit. The physiologist, for instance, is apt to overlook, and has sometimes been seduced to disbelieve in, the existence of any higher principle in man, than that which gives impulse to his sentient organization. The politician, in speculating upon the general laws of society, is led to disregard

all that essentially characterizes the individual.

Nor are these partial or contracted views, the result only of habits of abstract inquiry. The ideas of persons whose attention is engrossed with the daily concerns of life, with the petty details of the social economy, and who are in the habit of regarding men exclusively in relation to these concerns, are found to differ from those of men accustomed to regard their fellow creatures with more comprehensive views, as widely as the speculations of the general at the head of his army respecting its human materials, are remote from those of the philosopher in his closet, investigating, with regard to the same beings, the laws of consciousness.

View of the
human be-
ing peculiar
to Religion.

Religion claims the prerogative of science in considering Man under an aspect altogether peculiar to itself, and in fixing the attention on an order of facts totally distinct from the phenomena which arrest the attention of the anatomist, or which employ the speculations of the philosopher. Religion exhibits to us Man simply as a being possessed of what in Scripture is emphatically termed *the soul*, in reference not to the living principle common to the animal creation, but to the spiritual faculty, in respect of which he is distinguished from every other creature in this world, and individually sepa-

rated from every fellow being, as rational, accountable, and immortal. This view of man is so peculiar to religion, that we discover scarcely any traces of it, either in the ordinary conversation of men, or in any of the speculations of science or of philosophy. It is a view altogether alien and repugnant to the notions of the generality of mankind; one which they can with difficulty be brought to entertain, and which they with reluctance realize. Yet of so much importance is it in the discussion of any religious question, that till the habit be attained of regarding man simply and solely under this aspect, it is impossible to understand aright the purpose and bearings of Christianity.

The view which religion unfolds of the value of the human soul, is peculiar in two material respects; first, as regards the integral value of the individual, and secondly, as regards the absolute parity of all human beings. The doctrine of the Gospel, while it exalts the importance of the moral being in the scale of existence, strips him of all the artificial trappings of earthly pride. It passes over all that distinguishes man in the view of his fellow, or that constitutes the subject of his self-complacency, by pronouncing all men to be in a state of spiritual death, "shut up under sin." "All have sinned;" all must die: these circumstances, in respect of which no one human being is dis-

Discoveries
of Revela-
tion relative
to the value
of the soul.

tinguishable from another, are the only circumstances attaching to his condition, of which Christianity takes cognizance. Upon each individual member of the vast aggregate upon which the man of science, and the man of power, look so proudly, the Gospel teaches us to set an inconceivable value, but a value which admits of no disparity of degree, inasmuch as it does not originate in any qualities by which certain portions of that aggregate are capable of being separately characterized. "Thy brother for whom Christ died," is a consideration which forbids that contemptuous estimate of the many, in which it is so flattering to self-love to indulge, imparting to the foolish things of the world, to the weak, the base, and the despised, an importance fully equal to all that can be claimed by the wise and the mighty. The same price has been set upon the soul of every man. "Christ died for all," because "all were dead," and because all are alike capable of the same salvation. Redemption stamps a dignity upon the soul of the meanest participant of our nature, that does not allow of our esteeming him "common or unclean," or of our considering his actual salvation as in itself less important than that of the highest among intelligent beings. Such is the view Christianity exhibits of the sovereignty of God, the value of the Atonement, the transforming

efficiency of Divine Grace, the capacity of the soul itself, and the glorious change which the whole human being shall undergo at the resurrection, that all that differences man from man in any other relation than his relation to his Maker, is lost in the contemplation : " It is the " same God who worketh all in all."

The excellence of the soul is purely a doctrine of Revelation. Its immortality might be made out as probable by the light of reason, but what is immortality, as attaching to a derived, dependent being, but a negative circumstance, the whole value of which arises from the condition and the character of which it is the ordained consummation? Did Revelation simply inform us that man is immortal, it would only have descended from heaven to bring us " a message of despair." The excellence of the soul is not to be deduced from its immortality, but from the stupendous nature of the interposition by which its Divine Author has been pleased to express his concern for its final happiness, his knowledge of its inestimable worth. " God *so* loved the world, that he " gave his only begotten Son," that the souls of all might not perish. Apart from the revelation of this wonderful fact, it would have been impossible to form an adequate idea of the value of the soul of man in the Divine mind. The love with which the Father hath loved the

human race, cannot, in possibility, have any respect to the qualities which distinguish the individual from his fellows. The gift of his Son was not purchased by the merits of those whom he died to save, for, while they were yet sinners, "Christ died for the ungodly."

This view of man requisite to the due discharge of the ministerial office.

§ 2. This being then the view which Christianity teaches us to take of mankind as the subjects of the Gospel message, it must belong to the character of the Christian minister to maintain an habitual reference to these their essential circumstances, to the comparative exclusion of every other consideration; it must be his business to regard the soul of man, as the Divine Being regards it, stripped of all the extrinsic investments of mortality. Viewed under this aspect, it will appear a matter of small account, what is the external character of the individual whom he shall be able to rescue from the common danger that envelops the whole race. In this sense, the minister of Christ will "know no man after the flesh." It will be his habitual effort to contemplate human beings with the feelings with which he would gaze upon so many disembodied spirits, could they be made visible to his senses. The moral evils which others, while they share in their influence, are so impatient to resent, he will regard with commiseration, chiefly as they oppose the holy and benevolent purposes of the

Redeemer. Disregardful of his selfish interests, he will gladly spend and be spent for the souls of those whom he labours to reconcile to God, although the more abundantly he loves, the less he be loved. A peculiarity of character, the genuine result of the principles which Christianity originates, will be gradually formed by this habit of holding converse with men under the impressions of eternity; a peculiarity which separates a person from the sympathy of men in general, still more sensibly than the studies of the recluse theorist, or the technical habits of a profession. Some degree, however, of this habit of mind, is an essential qualification in order to the competent discharge of the sacred function; it is the true *professional* character of the Christian minister. Nor is it less necessary, in prosecuting such inquiries as the present, which involve the nature of Christianity and the design of its institutions, steadily to bear in mind the peculiarity of reference which every thing in religion bears to the soul as the spiritual reality of man.

It is scarcely necessary to contrast with this representation, the opposite views which engross the minds of ecclesiastical politicians. It has been already shewn, how entirely at variance the fact of the separate accountability of moral beings, is, with the assumption of a spiritual jurisdictional power: the equal value of

Contrast in certain abettors of ecclesiastical claims.

the souls of all mankind is a consideration not less fatal to the assumptions of a spiritual superiority. It is remarkable how the abettors of ecclesiastical claims uniformly speak of men at large, as persons to be taught, or as things to be governed, instead of regarding them as beings to be saved. Their notion of Christianity seems to be, that it is nothing more than a dispensation of intellectual discovery, or a system of government founded on certain modifications of political science, by means of which the subjects of their divinely-chartered powers, are to be ruled, and guided, and led, and commanded, all along the way to heaven. They indeed admit, that the salvation of mankind is the end of the Gospel, and that the means of salvation is faith, in the Son of God; they admit, moreover, that the preaching of the Gospel, provided it be in certain places, and by certain persons, is, to be the instrument of their salvation; but it is the more manifest, from the very tone in which these admissions are made, that their views are those of a secular mind, wholly unhabituated to feel the reality of its own spiritual condition, and to look upon the souls of others as, individually, equally precious in the sight of Him who died to redeem them by his precious blood.

On ecclesiastical obedience

§ 3. There is, unquestionably, some description of government proper to the churches of

Christ. "Obey them," says St. Paul, "that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves, for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account." In this passage, we have the sum and substance of ecclesiastical government. An obedience is claimed, the ground of which is the character of those to whom it is due: this is not the ground of political obedience. Submission to the authority of rule is enjoined, but the object of this rule is also specified,—the guardianship of the soul: this cannot be the rule of power. The passage consists of an adjuration, rather than a command. By the watchful solicitude and holy zeal of those primitive pastors, by the moral authority which attached to their office, by the solemn responsibility connected with their charge, the Apostle enforces the duty of an uncompelled submission, reminding them that it was their souls, their own souls, to which that rule, that oversight had reference. What argument could be more impressively affecting? What, on the other hand, could have been more inappropriate, had that rule consisted in a power underived from character, unattended by the circumstances which gave weight to this exhortation; had it been a rule enforced by temporal sanctions, which left no alternative but an involuntary, undiscretional submission?

The use which has been made of this passage, to enforce a passive obedience to ecclesiastical authority, is founded on a gross perversion of its true meaning. The *rule* which it refers to, was of a nature exceedingly different from that which is exercised in the ordinary government of Christian societies, since the authority of these elders obviously related to doctrinal guidance. "Remember them," says the Apostle in a parallel passage, "who are your guides, (had the rule over you) who have spoken unto you the word of God, whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation." To "preach the word," to "reprove," to "rebuke," to "exhort with all long-suffering"—were the duties which these rulers were authorized and commissioned to fulfil; and no other species of power, or authority, was vested in them, than was requisite for the uncontrolled discharge of these sacred duties.*

* "And sure if a man must undertake the care of no more souls than he may be able to *watch over* in order to his *giving an account* of them, we may easily conclude that he will never take all the souls in a numerous modern diocese for the objects of his inspection and care, if ever he expect to give up his account with comfort or hope. He will rather think the souls of a numerous congregation a heavy weight, and be under very anxious thoughts, lest many of them should miscarry for want of his vigilance and care." BOYSE'S *Sermon on the Office of a Scriptural Bishop*. Works, folio. p. 82.

The nature of the power and authority which attach to the pastor of a church, has, however, been sufficiently illustrated in the preceding chapter; and it follows, from the principles there vindicated, that that power cannot be the proper basis of any thing like what is called ecclesiastical government. In a voluntary society, power, strictly speaking, must have its source in the general will; by whatsoever moral considerations, therefore, the exercise of jurisdictional power, in a religious society, may be regulated, or enforced, it cannot, in this respect, differ from that which belongs of right to every free association. A Christian society is not left to frame its own laws irrespectively of the general rules provided in the word of Christ; but so far as the enforcing of those rules devolves upon the church, the power must reside in the society at large, and the act must be substantially that of the church itself. The same arguments that were employed to establish the necessary conditions of a voluntary society, in reference to the terms of communion, apply with equal force to the ultimate sanction of the laws of a free society,—the exclusion of the offender, and of course, virtually, to every intermediate exercise of authority.

True source
of ecclesi-
astical
power:

§ 4. When a person joins himself to a community of individuals who have, by their religious profession, separated themselves from the

Nature of
the visible
fellowship
of Christ-
ians.

world, he, in that voluntary act, recognises the principles and the objects of that separation. In making his selection of a particular community, for the purpose of uniting with its members in the most solemn actions of which our social nature renders us collectively capable, it must be supposed, that he is influenced by a regard to the spiritual advantages such association is designed to afford; and by the conviction, more particularly, that the ordinances of religion are, within that society, administered in their purity, and that the Christian character is exhibited in the general conduct of its members. His joining himself to such a community, includes the open profession of a belief in "the holy Catholic church, and in the communion of saints," as an existing reality; for in thus uniting with a definite portion of the Visible Church, he first becomes a visible member of the Church Universal. It is at this period that he becomes capable of exercising towards his fellow Christians, in that particular relation, those special duties which bind together the members of the Catholic Church. To speak of a visible member of the Church Universal, yet in communion with no portion of its members, must be considered as a contradiction in terms. As well might it be said of any individual, that all the inhabitants of the town in which he resides are his relations, when he is not connected, by

either blood or marriage, with any one of them.*

An alliance to the Visible Church can take place only by means of a specific relation to some association of its members. The choice of the particular religious fellowship, rests with the individual, but, having made his election, he enters himself not merely a member of that particular society, but by his profession, recognised by the church that receives him, a member of the general society of true believers throughout the world. A church is nothing more than "a congregation of believing men," and every congregation is a portion of the true Catholic Church, which is composed of true believers.

An introduction into the Visible Church, however, it may be said, takes place at baptism; how, then, can it be represented as consequent

* "First, *Every Christian is under an obligation to join in Church society with some others*; because it is his duty "to profess himself a Christian, and to own his religion publicly, and to partake of the ordinances and sacraments of the Gospel, which cannot be without society with some church or other. Every Christian, as such, is bound to look upon himself as the member of a body, viz. the visible Church of Christ; and how can he be known to be a member, who is not united with other parts of the body? There is then an obligation upon all Christians, to engage in a religious society with others, for partaking of the ordinances of the Gospel." STILLINGFLEET. *Irenicum*, B. I. Ch. vi. § 3.

upon an after-act of religious profession? An answer to this may, in the first place, be given, by referring the objector to the formularies of the Church of England itself, in proof that the person baptized is not considered as *ipso facto* in actual communion with the Visible Church. The rite of Confirmation evidently supposes, that some other species of profession, than that of sponsors, is a pre-requisite. The sign of communion, indeed, is generally held to be a participation in the Eucharist. The laws of ecclesiastical incorporations, however, have little to do with the present subject. The broad, undistinguishing national profession of Christianity, which belongs to them, involves no separation from the world, admits of no selection of character, and precludes, therefore, whatever spiritual advantages are connected with an association of believers, founded upon opposite principles. Baptism, then, it may be replied to the objector, according to the views of those who recognise the right of infants to be so brought unto Christ, is not symbolical of initiation into the *visible* Church, nor does it constitute the child a member of any Christian society. Into an actual voluntary association like that of the Christian fellowship, no person can be introduced, who is incapable, as an infant is, of exhibiting the requisite qualifications, and of performing the consequent duties. Baptism is

the seal of a covenant which relates, not to the outward social relation of the members of the Church of Christ to one another, but to the spiritual relation of all the members to the Head of the Church, which is Christ. At the first promulgation of Christianity, Baptism, as it formed an expression of religious obedience, was of necessity a term of communion; but Baptism, in itself, apart from its forming an evidence of conversion, constituted no claim to fellowship with a particular society. It was an initiatory ordinance, and may still be considered as such, in a figurative sense; an initiation into the school, the religion of Christ. As respects, however, the visible company of believers, Baptism does not form an introduction to actual communion. An individual can become a member of the Visible Church only by publicly joining himself in Christian fellowship to some association of its members.

Viewed in this light, the transaction itself of a first introduction into a Christian society, will appear to possess an importance and a solemnity, far beyond what might seem to attach to the mere circumstance of voluntary association with others in Christian worship. Next to the nuptial bonds, upon which the New Testament impresses so sacred a character, the connexion with a Christian church is,

of all voluntary relations, unspeakably the most important. If there is such a thing as the Visible Church of Christ upon earth, if the Christian fellowship is not an absolute chimera, the privilege of belonging to a congregation of its genuine members, does not admit of being lightly appreciated; nor will any one who has the least degree of intelligent reverence for the institutions of Christ, on whose commands such an association is built, be so heedless of the social obligations which it involves, as to connect himself with any church, without a sincere intention of submitting to its laws and its discipline. It is of little consequence what the external character of that church may be, as respects the rank, or number, or intellectual qualifications of its members. The authority of its ministers, the claims of the brotherhood, the value of the ordinances of Christ, are unimpaired by such circumstances as these: and what serves to dignify the connexion upon which he enters, is this, that it is a fellowship which binds him in visible union to the general company of true believers throughout the world,—to the holy Catholic Church.

Obligations
of Church
member-
ship.

§ 5. The *positive* duties which devolve upon the member of such a community, arise out of its very nature and design; they are comprehended in his attendance upon the ordinances

of social worship,* and in his compliance with such regulations as may be adopted for the general government or order of the church. The *moral* duties of the Christian relation, may be summed up, in the general duty of sustaining a personal character in correspondence, both as to belief and religious conduct, to that of the society to which the individual has voluntarily attached himself; as well as of respecting the claims of the pastor, and the obligations of mutual charity. Ecclesiastical discipline has no legitimate object, save the enforcement of some one of these points of duty. Three cases only justify the infliction of the extreme expression of church censure, *viz.* wilful heresy,† flagrant immorality,‡ or, a contumacious disregard of the previous censures of the elders of the society.¶ In a voluntary community, either of these cases will be of extremely rare occurrence. Few would court an association with persons whose sentiments they must regard with repugnance, or whose censures they despise.

* "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is" Heb. x. 25.

† "A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject." Titus iii. 10.

‡ "Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person." 1 Cor. v. 13.

¶ "If he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen, and a publican." Matt. xviii. 17.

Circumstances, however, may occur, which justify the suspension of a member of a Christian church from actual communion, as demanding the institution of inquiry, but which do not warrant the infliction of censure. Thus, for example, it has been customary among Protestant Dissenters, for a member becoming bankrupt, voluntarily to suspend his attendance upon the Lord's supper, and to request an examination of his conduct that may clear his moral character from imputation. Even when clearly attributable to unavoidable misfortune, bankruptcy has used to be considered as such a stain upon religious profession, that a deacon or elder, placed in such a predicament, would not hesitate to lay down his office, lest the character of the society should be at all compromised in his own. The true-bred Christian has his nice notions of honour, as well as the man of the world; they form a safeguard to his principles; they are the out-works of morality. Deeply is it to be deprecated, that the tone of Christian society should in this respect suffer any depression, or that a sense of justice, a sensibility to reproach when "not the reproach of Christ," should cease to characterize those whose profession distinguishes them as men not of this world. "If ye be reproached," says St. Peter, "for the name of Christ, happy are

“ye—but let none of you suffer (reproach) as
“an evil doer.”

Where a regard to the honour of the Christian profession is the actuating spirit of the society, it may possibly induce what will by some persons be regarded as rigid notions of discipline; this is, however, a ruling motive, strictly consonant with the spirit and design of religious separation; nor is any worse consequence likely to ensue from it, than the self-exclusion of the worldly-minded, or the insincere, from so unattractive an association, by which means what the church might lose in point of comprehension, it would gain in respect of spirituality of character. How strict soever may be the discipline of a church, some palpable deviation from the strict line of Christian propriety, it is to be remembered, can alone render the conduct of an individual obnoxious to censure. Where there exists that real unity of feeling and interest which characterizes true Christians, love will constitute “the bond of perfectness;” while to attempt to keep up the semblance of discipline, when the spirit of Christianity is fled, will always prove unavailing. The charge of strictness, and even of intolerance, has sometimes, however, been very improperly laid against religious communities, in consequence of their maintaining principles and laws repugnant to the more *liberal* views of the ad-

On strictness of discipline.

vocates for unrestricted communion. But tolerance and intolerance are terms which cannot be justly applied to any rules, by which a voluntary society may bind itself to act, in reference to a particular standard. The utmost laxity is compatible with the bitterest intolerance. Ecclesiastical regulations may be arraigned on the ground of expediency, as injudicious; but the charge of bigotry or uncharitableness, can be deserved only by the avowed sentiments or conduct of the members of such a society, towards those who are *not* of its communion.

That the conduct of a member of a Christian society, falls under very different cognizance from similar conduct in a stranger, out of the pale of its communion, is clearly deducible from the language of St. Paul, in which, alluding to the exhortation he had given the Corinthian brethren, not to associate with fornicators or idolaters, he deems it necessary thus to explain his meaning: " Yet not altogether with the " covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters of this " world ; for then must ye needs go out of this " world ; but if any man that is called *a brother*," (be chargeable with such immoralities) with such a one not to associate; " no, not even to " eat." " For what," he adds, " have I to do to " judge them that are without? Do not ye " judge them that are within! But them that " are without God judgeth." Surely, if the

honour of the Christian profession, demanded that this broad distinction should then be drawn between the Church and the World, the same right to judge those who are within the pale of its communion, and a similar reason for exercising it, must now belong to Christian societies. As to those who are without, we are neither called upon to pass sentence upon their characters, nor allowed to resent their crimes. The Apostle adduces a consideration adapted to extinguish every feeling of resentment or intolerance, when he adds, "Them God judgeth."* Wheresoever the line of religious separation may be drawn, it forms no legitimate boundary for either the sentiment of charity or the exertions of kindness. The Christian is expressly bound by the laws of his profession, to "do good unto all men;" while he is to "love the brotherhood," he must "honour all men," adding, "to brotherly kindness," universal "charity." The specific exhortation to "walk in wisdom towards them that are without," implies that a conduct the very reverse of what shall deserve to be stigmatised as uncourteous or intolerant, is the peculiar duty of the Christian.

* Perhaps the religious societies which are the most strict and rigid in their discipline, of any churches in modern days, are those of the United Brethren: yet none are perhaps in their general character more tolerant, or less infected with the spirit of sectarian *proselytism*.

Nevertheless, the standard of religious profession must not be lowered to the level of worldly society; nor must we suffer the heavenly name of charity to be employed as a pass-name by latitudinarian indifference. There is, doubtless, such a thing as a sectarian narrowness in the discipline of Christian churches, often proceeding from the spirit of intolerance. Whatever regulations virtually tend to divide good men from one another, by excluding from communion with the church any sincere Christians, whether they relate to the terms of communion, or to the nature of its discipline, partake of the very essence of schism, and are absolutely at variance with the spirit of the Gospel.

On Excommunication.

§ 6. Although submission to ecclesiastical discipline is, in the first instance, voluntary on the part of the individual, since it is by his own free act he becomes connected with any Christian society at all, yet it is not to be imagined that no other species of power or authority attaches to the decisions of a Christian church, than what is derived, as in other free societies, from common consent. The same moral authority which attends the promulgation of the Gospel, is vested in the church for edification, and attends the administration of the laws of Christ, with respect to the conduct of its members. To the spiritual censures of a Christian society, when in accordance with the

dictates of the Scriptures, and the secret voice of conscience, an importance not ideal, a fearful efficiency belongs.* From the consequences

* “The right of inflicting censures, and of proceeding in extreme cases to excommunication, is an essential branch of that power with which the church is endowed, and bears the same relation to discipline that the administration of criminal justice bears to the general principles of government. When this right is exerted in upholding the ‘faith once delivered to the saints,’ or enforcing a conscientious regard to the laws of Christ, it maintains its proper place, and is highly beneficial.”—“I am far from thinking lightly of the spiritual power, with which Christ has armed his church. It is a high and mysterious one, which has no parallel on earth. Nothing, in the order of means, is equally adapted to awaken compunction in the guilty, with spiritual censures impartially administered: the sentence of excommunication in particular, harmonising with the dictates of conscience, and re-echoed by her voice, is truly terrible: it is the voice of God, speaking through its legitimate organ, which he who despises, or neglects, ranks with ‘heathen men and publicans,’ joins the synagogue of Satan, and takes his lot with an unbelieving world, doomed to perdition. Excommunication is a sword which, strong in its apparent weakness, and the sharper, and more keenly edged for being divested of all sensible and exterior envelopements, lights immediately on the spirit, and inflicts a wound which no balm can cure, no ointment can mollify, but which must continue to ulcerate and burn, till healed by the blood of atonement, applied by penitence and prayer. In no instance is that axiom more fully verified, ‘the weakness of God is stronger than men, and the foolishness of God is wiser than men,’ than in the discipline of his church. By incumbering it with foreign aid, they have

of such a sentence, it is not at the will of the offender to withdraw himself. The voice of the church, in such a case, is not the voice of man, but the voice of God, and "he that de-

* 1 Thess. iv.
8.

"spiseth, despiseth not man but God."* An unjust sentence, it is true, can have no such force, but would seem to fall back upon the church that inflicts it. "A groundless sentence of ex-communication, or absolution," remarks a very judicious Expositor, "cannot possibly make any alteration in a man's state or character: all such decisions being merely *de-claratory*. This has been entirely overlooked, in all those scandalous perversions of church-censures, which are the real cause of that relaxation, or rather destitution of discipline, which now so generally prevails.†

† SCOTT,
(Rev. Thos.)
on Matt.
xviii. 18.

The cognizance of matters of offence and scandal, as distinct from civil offences, and the practice of excommunication, as the ultimate sanction of ecclesiastical censure, were exercised, it is well known, by the Jews in their synagogue government. Many expositors sup-

"robbed it of its real strength; by calling in the aid of temporal pains and penalties, they have removed it from the spirit to the flesh, from its contact with eternity, to unite it with secular interests; and as the corruption of the best things, is the worst, have rendered it the scandal and reproach of our holy religion." HALL *On Terms of Communion*. 8vo. pp. 138-140.

pose that this circumstance is alluded to by our Lord, in a passage often cited in connexion with the subject of church-government, to which the above-cited comment refers. "More-
 " over, if thy brother shall trespass against
 " thee, go and tell him his fault alone: if he
 " shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.
 " But if he will not hear thee, then take with
 " thee one or two more, that in the mouth of
 " two or three witnesses, every word may be
 " established. And if he shall neglect to hear
 " them, tell it unto *the Church*; but if he neg-
 " lect to hear the church, let him be to thee as
 " a pagan and a publican." At the period
 when these words were spoken by our Lord, no
 Christian society was in existence, and the
 moral duty which they enforce, could not, it is
 argued, be understood as suspended on the fu-
 ture circumstances of Christian society. There
 is nothing in the passage which looks like the
 institution of a new ordinance, or a reference to
 an order of things not then existing. It must
 therefore allude, and must have been appre-
 hended by the disciples as alluding, to the esta-
 blished usages of the synagogue discipline.*
 The intention of our Lord was not to enjoin

* This opinion has received the countenance of both Calvin and Beza. *Nam certé tanquam de Judæis hæc dici apparet, saltem ex eo quod addit, sit tibi sicut Ethnicus et Publicanus.* BEZA, in loc.

submission to any species of ecclesiastical authority, but rather, to inculcate a peaceful and placable spirit, and to prescribe rules for obviating either the indulgence of private revenge, or the scandal of litigation before heathen tribunals. In this view, the observance of these directions, was not less practicable under the existing circumstances of the times, than it has been at every subsequent period. Neither the worship of the Temple, nor the discipline of the Synagogue, was as yet abrogated. The disciples still retained an attachment to all the forms of the Jewish polity, and, doubtless, still considered themselves as members of the Jewish Church. It was as such, rather than in reference to any peculiarity of character that was subsequently to attach to them as Christians, that our Lord usually addressed them, opposing to the corrupt glosses of the Rabbins, the true spirit of the laws of Moses, and superadding those "new commandments" which were congenial with the more spiritual nature of the new economy. When, however, the followers of Jesus Christ came, after his ascension, to form themselves into distinct synagogues, their adherence to this peaceful and equitable mode of proceeding, was enforced by considerations of still greater urgency. "Dare any of you," writes St. Paul to the Corinthians,* "having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust,

* 1 Cor. vi.
1.

“and not before the saints?” With just indignation he reprobates the practice of one Christian going to law with another, “and that before the unbelievers.” “Why,” he exclaims, “do ye not rather take wrong? Why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?” It was not that any persons in the church were possessed of judicial authority to decide in such matters, except in consequence of a common appeal being made to them;—on the contrary, the Apostle, as if to remind them of the insignificance of the objects for which they contended, tells them to appoint such as were of the least esteem in the church, to be judges of secular things. The case adverted to by St. Paul, differs in no material respect from that which is specified by our Lord. Both passages refer us to an ecclesiastical authority, wholly distinct from the civil jurisdiction, and having nothing in common with any species of political power; the appeal to this authority resting wholly upon moral considerations, and submission to its decisions, although enforced by the strongest religious obligations, being the free act of the individual. The possible case of a contumacious disregard for this tribunal, is expressly provided for: “If he neglect to hear the church, let him be to thee as a pagan or a publican.” The church could go no further.

In such a case, indeed, the principles common to all human societies, would lead us to regard the individual who disputed the authority of the church, as self-excluded from its communion; but it must never be forgotten, that a Christian assembly is not altogether a mere human society. Whatever may have been the primary import of our Lord's directions, certainly, in reference to the Christian Church, they become susceptible of a still more emphatic application. If we connect with this passage the subsequent verses,—“ Verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven,”—there is reason to suppose that a hardened disregard of the voice of a Christian society, places the offender in a state of fearful peril. It is therefore contended by many commentators, that the words “ the Church,” in the preceding verse, must be considered as spoken in anticipation of the formation of Christian assemblies; that they relate to the Church which our Lord was about to establish;—as in the address to Peter: “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock will I build my Church.” The declaration, “ whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven,” appears, it is true, to be immediately connected with a promise of the miraculous fulfilment of any request in which two of the disciples should agree; a promise evidently

of a special nature, and limited to the existing circumstances in which the disciples were placed. Yet, when our Saviour adds, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them," this solemn assertion of his omnipresence, and the promise it includes, must surely be considered as extending to all the future ages of the Church, and as having, indeed, a more peculiar reference prospectively, to the period when his followers should be deprived of his bodily presence, and should gather themselves together in the name of their ascended Lord.

Exclusion from the visible Church of Christ, by the voice of a Christian society, is surely an awful sentence, one that might well strike the conscience with dismay. But it may, perhaps, on this very account be doubted by some persons, whether even a declaratory power of excommunication of this extensive nature, is committed to any human society, or to any portion of the Christian Church; whether, in fact, the exclusion of an offender from a religious community, is to be regarded in a light essentially different from that in which we should view a similar transaction on the part of any other free society. Passages of Scripture, it must be admitted, have often been injudiciously cited in connexion with this subject, which, at least in their primary application, had reference to the con-

tempt of Apostolic authority, or to wilful departures from the faith, and that under the very peculiar circumstances attendant on the establishment of Christianity. These have been arrayed as the artillery of the Church, with a view to over-awe the impugnors of ecclesiastical authority, it being too hastily assumed, that they precluded the necessity of argument.

It might serve to dissipate much of the mysterious obscurity which seems to rest upon this part of our inquiry, to bear in mind, that the power to excommunicate evidently corresponds, in its nature as well as its source, to the power to admit into the visible Church: the commission to bind, and the commission to loose, are co-relative, and must be of similar extent. In the same sense that admission into "a congregation of faithful men," is to be considered as an initiation into the visible Church, excommunication from such a congregation, has in it the force of an exclusion from the Church. If the Church of Christ upon earth consists of such as exhibit the visible character of his professed disciples, then, by his religious character must it be determined, whether an individual belongs to the family of believers; and the same society which were acknowledged as competent to decide this point in favour of his admission to their communion, must be not less qualified to determine it in the negative, or to

pronounce upon the forfeiture of that character as the ground of his exclusion. Nothing, in fact, can justify the suspension, or at any rate, the exclusion of a communicant, but what would, if previously ascertained to exist, have absolutely debarred him from being received into the church. Religious character is, it has been endeavoured to prove, the sole indispensable requisite for admission. Excommunication, when just and appropriate, is the formal decision of the church, that the individual has forfeited that character, and is no longer worthy to be regarded as a member of the Church of Christ. In any other case, exclusion becomes an act as unmeaning as it is arbitrary and unjust. It has been, it must be admitted, resorted to, as the ultimate sanction of laws of discipline, when it could not be pretended, that resistance to what it was employed to enforce, involved the forfeiture of religious character; and in such instances, the act may be defended as being nothing more than the exercise of a right common to all societies, to enforce its own regulations, and to maintain agreement among its members even on points of order. But a Christian church can have no right to consider itself at liberty to frame regulations, which, if enforced, shall have the effect of excluding any true members of the Christian body from communion, in the character of offenders. The

laws of such a church, or the spirit of its discipline, must be regarded as decidedly schismatic and anti-christian. Excommunication can be viewed in no other light than that of a punishment; and it is a punishment which cannot be justly incurred, except by some offence against the laws of Christ. In treating that as an offence against itself, which is not an offence against Him, the church stands self-convicted of having a separate interest distinct from the honour of His cause. Moral obligation is the only authority by which the conscience can be ruled; and as this authority cannot be imparted, by any act of the church, to things in themselves indifferent, obedience, with regard to them, never can be constituted a religious duty, or an expression of religious character. Acts, therefore, which enforce compliance with such laws, whether they are the regulations of a national or of a congregational church, do but interpose so many arbitrary conditions of performing the will of Christ, and of enjoying the privileges of Christian society. To impose things indifferent as terms of communion, supposes that the church is possessed of some kind of authority which has not the spiritual advantage of its members for its object, and which does not rest upon religious obligation. To enforce the imposition by the severest punishment the church can inflict, is to confound all distinc-

tions of character, and the consequence must be, to bring both the authority and the discipline of the church into contempt.

A person who joins himself to a religious society, under the influence of right motives, acts under the conviction that it is his duty to make a public profession of Christian belief; and he testifies also, by that act, that he considers it as within the line of his duty, to attach himself to that particular church, and to observe towards its ministers and members those relative duties which arise out of the connexion. What imparts to excommunication all its propriety, is, that it is inflicted as the penalty of the breach of solemn obligations thus voluntarily incurred; that it is occasioned by a wilful dereliction of what the individual at his admission recognised as religious duty. His exclusion, if legitimate, does not discharge him from those obligations: the way is always open to his return. Where communion, however, does not constitute a duty, excommunication cannot be deserved,—cannot have any force as a punishment.

Communion with a religious society, is connected with the most important spiritual advantages: these constitute the design of Christian institutions, and a desire to participate in them, is the only proper motive by which a person can be actuated in applying to be received into such a society. If the applicant be a true Christian,

he will set a high value on the privilege, and will dread nothing that can befall him in this world, more than the loss of these religious advantages, connected as they are with the esteem of the good, and the prayers of the servants of Christ,—of those whom he has publicly recognised as such by joining their communion. Excommunication involves the forfeiture, therefore, of all that he most values, and in his view it will form a transaction of the greatest solemnity, as amounting to a virtual exclusion from the visible Church;—a decision which, if it harmonize with the dictates of conscience, cannot be evaded by obtaining admission into a different society, should he find one disposed to receive him. The effect of the monitory discipline in that case, will be consonant to the very design of Christian discipline: “He will “be ashamed,” and repent. If, however, he is found to despise the privileges he has justly forfeited, and “neglect to hear the church,” the church, in rejecting him from its communion, has sufficiently vindicated its own character: the example, as it relates to others, loses none of its efficiency by this circumstance; every purpose of discipline is fulfilled, except that which is frustrated by the obstinacy of the contumacious offender.

Such, then, appear to be the nature and the legitimate purpose of ecclesiastical discipline,

according to the power, or moral authority vested in the church "for edification and not "for destruction;" a species of authority which, so long as it remains unmixed with secular influence, unincumbered with foreign aid, is sufficiently guarded from abuse by its spiritual character, which confines it wholly to the conscience. The Christian minister, or the church at large, in the administration of this power, "can do nothing against the truth, but for the "truth." "As therefore the church may proceed thus far," remarks Jeremy Taylor, "yet "no Christian man or community of men may "proceed farther. For if they be deceived in "their judgement and censure, and yet have "passed only spiritual censures, they are "tally ineffectual, and come to nothing: there "is no effect remaining upon the soul, and such "censures are not to meddle with the body so "much as indirectly. But if any other judgement pass upon persons erring, such judgements whose effects remain, if the person be "unjustly censured, nothing will answer and "make compensation for such injuries."* But in truth, all that imparts force to such censures,—the secret conviction of their justice, the moral evidence of the authority from which they emanate, the piety, the affection, the religious character which concur to give weight to the decision of a Christian assembly, together

* *Liberty of
Prophecy-
ing*, § xv.

with the peculiar claims of the society upon the individual, and whatever solicitude may have been manifested to preclude the necessity of the final appeal;—all the circumstances, in fact, that constitute the real validity and impressiveness of such a proceeding, viewed either as a means of awakening the conscience, or as a judicial sanction, can receive no accession of force, no aggravating effect, from the aid of any thing extrinsic—from either the supervision of foreign authority, or the addition of temporal penalties. The administration of discipline, in the first instance, constitutes an important part of the pastoral episcopacy. Upon the pastor it peculiarly devolves “to exhort, to rebuke with “all authority,” and, as he would avoid the guilt of partaking of other men’s sins, to “rebuke them that sin before all, that others may “fear,” “without partiality,” yet “in meekness instructing them that oppose themselves, “if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.” If further measures are necessitated, it devolves upon the members of the body collectively, to “put away the wicked person” from among themselves;—to withdraw from a brother that walketh disorderly;—to clear themselves, in the case of open criminality, from participation in the scandal, with indignation, with fear, with zeal, with sorrow.* This being accomplished,

* 2 Cor. vii.
11.

ecclesiastical discipline has no other object. "Sufficient to such (an offender) is the punishment thus inflicted by many." To punish otherwise than by excluding from spiritual privileges, cannot possibly belong to a church of Christ: it were an express violation of the spirit of the Gospel. Such an act were to pour the greatest contempt upon the reproof given by our Lord to those disciples who asked his permission to call down fire from heaven to destroy the persons who refused him the rites of hospitality. The Church cannot punish the ungodly. She has no weapons of defence but such as are spiritual; much less any weapons of vengeance. Her prerogative does not extend beyond the correction of those who respect her authority; to all others she must be content that her might should be weakness, her authority foolishness, and that like her Divine Lord, she should be despised and rejected of men.*

* "That the Church hath peculiar laws to be governed by, appears by the distinct nature, end, and design of the constitution of it; which is not to preserve any outward rights, but to maintain and keep up a religious society for the service of God; and therefore the penal sanctions of these laws cannot properly be any corporal or pecuniary mulct, but somewhat answerable to the nature of the society. It must be then somewhat which implies the deprivation of that which is the chiefest benefit of that society. The benefits of it are the privileges and honour which men enjoy by thus associating themselves for so high an employ-

On penal
sanctions
Church-
censures.

§ 7. There have been doctors of the Church, however, who conceived that they found in the New Testament a warrant for making the good of the soul a pretence for tormenting the body of the ecclesiastical offender; who imagined that the identical inspired Volume which contains the message of mercy from Heaven, which teaches us to love our enemies, and to return blessings for imprecations, sanctions the utmost ingenuity of demoniacal invention, in punishing those whom no principle either of reason or of Christianity allows of our regarding with other feelings than the tenderest compassion, either as erring brethren or as the captives of Satan. They have thought it conducive to the honour of Christianity, that the Church should have credit with the world for possessing a power with which Christ never invested her, in order that she might gain by striking with terror, what she could not accomplish by conciliating love. The passage which has been deemed sufficient to support pretensions so repugnant

“ment. That punishment then must be the loss of those
“privileges which the corporation enjoys, which must be by
“exclusion of the offending person from communion with
“the society. Hence we see it is evident, that which we
“call excommunication is the greatest penalty which the
“Church, as a society, can inflict upon the members of it,
“considered as such.” Bp. STILLINGFLEET’S *Irenicum*,
B. I. Ch. viii. § 2.



to the whole tenor of the New Testament institutes, is that in the Epistle to the Corinthians: "To deliver such a one unto Satan, for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

Had ecclesiastical rulers simply adhered to the letter of this passage, had they formally delivered over the offender, "in the name of the Lord Jesus," and left Satan to do the part assigned him in the words of the Apostle, (which the best expositors understand to relate to the miraculous infliction of diseases by the agency of evil spirits,) then, it would have been seen whether the spirits knew their masters,—whether it was the authority of Paul, or the incantations of the sons of Sceva, by which they were let loose upon the offender. But that men, styling themselves ministers of Christ, should take into their own hands the office of the destroyer, and become the bloody executioners of the uninspired dictates of their own fallible judgment,—that they who are forbidden even to "strive," should yet dare persecute,—that they who are commanded to be gentle to all men, should become their tormentors, as grudging Satan his proper work, and impatient of the slow vengeance of the Almighty;—this must be regarded as the very consummation of the mystery of iniquity.

Punishment of a miraculous nature, is dis-

tinguished from every other kind of punishment by this essential circumstance, that being the evident result of supernatural agency, it is adapted to act immediately upon the conscience, and by this means to conduce to the "saving of the spirit." It is, besides, impossible that miraculous punishment should in any instance take place, but as the just consequence of wilful impiety. The inspiration of infallible wisdom, is indispensable to the administration of Divine power: we may therefore be confident that the commission, or the power of Satan, is never suspended on the erring will of man. The passage in question affords not the shadow of an authority for substituting in place of miraculous punishment, the penal sanctions of human power. These cannot be brought to act upon the conscience; they have no controlling force upon the reason; they attest nothing—prove nothing; and therefore avail nothing towards the saving of the soul.

On penal
sanctions.

To return, however, to the subject of spiritual censures; when the Church is, to use Bishop Stillingfleet's phrase, "incorporated with the commonwealth, and the right of supreme management of ecclesiastical power doth fall into the Magistrate's hands, Excommunication becomes of necessity a very different transaction;" it assumes the character of a civil proceeding. It then is rendered necessary that

“ matters of so great weight should not be left
 “ to the arbitrary pleasure of any church-offi-
 “ cers.” “ The right of adding temporal and
 “ civil sanctions to Church-censures, and so
 “ enforcing the spiritual weapons of the Church,
 “ with the more keen and sharp ones of the
 “ civil state,” must attach solely to the magis-
 trate. To him lies “ the appeal in case of un-
 “ just censures;” “ not,” adds the learned Pre-
 late whose words we are using, “ that he can
 “ repeal a just censure in the Church as to its
 “ spiritual effect, but he may suspend the tem-
 “ poral effect of it; in which case it is the duty
 “ of pastors to discharge their office and ac-
 “ quiesce.” For “ the force and efficacy of all
 “ church-censures *in foro humano*, flow from
 “ the Civil Power, there being no proper effect
 “ following them as to civil rights, but from
 “ the Magistrate’s sanction.”*

There can be no question, that Church offi-
 cers ought not to be entrusted with the dis-
 pensation of political power: it would lead, it
 has uniformly led, to the most intolerable spe-
 cies of tyranny. In a political church, there-
 fore, or in other words, an establishment, it is
 highly proper that ecclesiastical jurisdiction
 should be defined and settled by Acts of Par-
 liament, and referred, as to its actual admi-
 nistration, to doctors of civil law, to chancel-
 lors, officials, surrogates, and proctors. Ex-

* Bishop
 STILLING-
 FLEET. Dis.
 concerning
 the Power
 of Excom-
 munication,
 &c. p. vii.

communication, by the Church of England, is attended by civil penalties of no insignificant nature. The offender is "excluded from the body of the church, is disabled to bring any action, or sue any person in the common law-courts: he is disabled to be a witness in any cause: he cannot be attorney or procurator for another: he is to be turned out of the church by the church-warden, and not to be allowed Christian burial." Happily, it is not every *priest* who is possessed of so formidable a prerogative. The sentence can be pronounced only by the bishop or other person in holy orders, being a master of arts at least; also, the priest's name pronouncing such sentence, is to be expressed in the instrument issuing under seal out of the court.*

* Gibson,
Cod. 435,
1095.

Surely, it is the obvious dictate of reason and equity, that civil penalties of this fearful nature should be consequent only upon civil offences. The Canons of the Church of England shew, however, what a perfect anomaly ecclesiastical power is in a free country; how utterly incompatible the existence of such an engine of arbitrary tyranny, is with a constitutional government. The Canons declare, that Whosoever shall hereafter affirm that the Church of England is not a true and an Apostolical church; or, that the form of God's worship contained in

the Book of Common Prayer and Administration of Sacraments, containeth any thing that is repugnant to the Scriptures;* or, that any of the Thirty-nine Articles are in any part superstitious or erroneous, or such as he may not with a good conscience subscribe unto; or, that the government of the Church of England, under his Majesty, by Archbishops, Bishops, Deans, Archdeacons, and the rest that bear office in the same, is Anti-Christian or repugnant to the word of God; or, that the form and manner of making and consecrating Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, containeth any thing in it, that is repugnant to the word of God; also, Whosoever shall hereafter separate from the communion of saints, as it is approved by the Apostolic rules in the Church of England, and combine themselves in a new brotherhood; or, who shall affirm that such ministers as refuse to subscribe to the form and manner of God's worship in the Church of England and their adherents, may truly take unto themselves the name of another church; or, that there are within this realm other meetings, assemblies, or

* And by the Act of Uniformity, it is enacted, " That if any one shall declare or speak any thing in the derogation or depraving of the Book of Common Prayer, he shall, for the first offence, suffer imprisonment one whole year without bail or mainprize; and, for the second offence, shall be imprisoned during his life."

congregations of the king's born subjects, than such as by the laws of this land are held and allowed, which may rightly challenge to themselves the name of true and lawful churches; or, finally, Whosoever shall affirm, that it is lawful for any sort of ministers and lay persons, or of either of them, to form together, and make rules, orders, or constitutions in things ecclesiastical, without the king's authority, and shall submit themselves to be ruled and governed by them: "Let them be excommunicated *ipso facto*, and not be restored until they repented and publicly revoke these their wicked and anabaptistical errors." So that according to the unrepealed decrees of what its advocates represent as the most tolerant and Catholic of Churches, the whole body of the English Dissenters lie under one sweeping sentence of excommunication, as wicked persons, deserving to be visited with the vengeance of the Civil Power!—Such is the discipline of the Church of England!

It is true, that these ecclesiastical decrees have never passed into the law of the land; and their operation, as regards civil rights, has been rendered nugatory by subsequent Acts of Parliament. A constitutional government has been established on the overthrow of an arbitrary despotism, and has taken under its immediate protection those whom the Church of

the Stuarts anathematized. The Convocation has been silenced, and the Church itself placed under the control of the legitimate Legislature. Its ecclesiastical constitution remains, however, unchanged; the clergy still swear obedience to its obsolete canons, and boast of its Apostolic claims; and still the brand of Anti-Christian intolerance remains stamped on its very forehead, to testify its parentage. It is the State only that has become tolerant. No act of the Church has reversed these decrees; they still formally survive in the exclusive regulations of her colleges, the obligation of her ministers, and the provisions of her ritual.*

Yet there are some apologists for the Church of England, who, with singular waywardness, while they will hardly listen to any other charge that can be brought against the Establishment, would fain, with deep regret, acknowledge, that in respect of discipline, their Church is defective. They are far, indeed, from wishing to see enforced by civil penalties, its excommunicating decrees upon those without the pale of the establishment; but as respects the professed members of their Church, they imagine that the deficiency of discipline, is with great propriety made the subject of annual hu-

Want of discipline in the Church of England, no evil.

* See more especially, Canon XXVII, entitled *Schismatics not to be admitted to Communion*.

miliation and regret, in the service for Ash-Wednesday.* Whereas, the plain truth is this: The discipline prescribed by the Canons Ecclesiastical, could not be carried into effect, without the most oppressive injustice. What is thus feelingly deplored by many excellent individuals, from the purest motives, as though it were an evil accidentally connected with the object of their fond and almost idolatrous veneration, arises from the very constitution of an establishment, and is, in fact, a good instead of an evil; a mitigation, rather, of what would be in a free country an intolerable evil; the result of those happy changes which have taken place in our domestic policy, and the all-modifying spirit of more enlightened times.

Parochial discipline committed to the Churchwardens.

The xxvith Canon provides that notorious offenders shall not be admitted to the Communion; an exclusion which is generally considered as a "lesser excommunication." But the way in which the minister is instructed to proceed, renders the direction nugatory. The discipline of the parish is ostensibly vested in the Churchwardens, who are bound by oath to present their ordinaries all such public offences as they are particularly charged to inquire of in their several parishes; in particular, in the cases of such as are openly known to live in sin

* See *Communion Service*.

notorious without repentance, or who have maliciously and openly contended with their neighbours, and have not been reconciled: their said oath and their faithful discharging of them, being the chief means, according to the express language of the Canons, whereby public sins and offences may be reformed and punished. It is unnecessary to remark, that this part of the Churchwarden's office is never attempted to be discharged; and for this simple reason, the thing is morally impossible. It would only become, if attempted, the source of endless vexation and dispute, and the means of exercising a petty tyranny in every village; while the office itself would become identified in ignominy with that of a common informer.

May not, then, the minister himself, in the conscientious discharge of his sacred function, exclude from Christian communion the notorious offender? In the Church of England, as by law established, he has no such power. If he refuse to administer the sacrament in the church to the most infamous person, the man may appeal to the ecclesiastical court, and there, if he can secure the favour of the lay-chancellor, he may securely set both the minister and the bishop at defiance: nay, the minister, should he persist in refusing, is liable to be suspended, and even excommunicated for his contumacy. And in the Court of Arches,

bishops themselves are subject to the sentence of the chancellor.

Injustice of enforcing the discipline of the Church of England.

In the case, however, of an individual who comes to demand participation of the Lord's supper, as a qualification for an office in the army or the fleet, it is at the peril of incurring a suit at law, that the clergyman resists the application. The Church to which he has attached himself, has obtained from the State the boon, that all persons previously to admission into such posts, shall submit thus to qualify themselves; and the State, in its turn, exacts from the Church, as the price or condition of this grant, that all persons seeking to become thus qualified, shall be admitted. And is this any thing more than what is just? In the event of refusal on the part of the Church, though the matter be spiritual, a temporal damage is sustained by the individual; for this, accordingly, an action would be maintainable in the civil courts, and the defendant, if unable to bring legal proof of the fact on which he grounded the refusal, would be liable to damages.* Revolting as this gross profanation of the Lord's Supper must be to every pious mind, and intolerable as the predicament of the conscientious Episcopalian must sometimes be found,

* See the opinions of Mr. Serjeant Hill and others, in Towgood's Letters to White. *Appendix*. P. 309.

when he finds himself compelled to prostitute the symbols of the body and blood of Christ to persons who, *he knows*, are eating and drinking their own condemnation,—still, the minister of religion has no *right* to stand between a man and his temporal interests,—to deprive him of his post, or, it may be, his subsistence,—his honourable promotion, or his hard-earned pension. How flagitious soever may be the man's moral character, his services deserve from the country for which he has fought, their just reward. Were he, in voluntary, gratuitous hypocrisy, to offer himself as a communicant at the Lord's table, it would be highly fitting that the minister should have the discretional power of repelling him; but when he comes at the command of the Legislature, to perform a rite which the Church has procured to be made a condition of secular benefits,—if he be the sinner, who is the tempter? Surely the Church has no right to punish him for the crime which it in a manner necessitates.

The Church is, however, in such a connexion, a mere term of art. The person by whom this discretional power would be exercised, which would have the effect of inflicting civil penalties for offences of a spiritual nature, is the parish minister. But would it be consonant with the principles of the British constitution, that one man should be punishable at the discretion of

another private individual? Or, on the supposition that this power of exclusion were vested in some bench of ecclesiastical superiors, would it be endured that a man chargeable with no civil misdemeanour, obnoxious to no law of his country, should be amenable to a court of character, and subjected to severe temporal penalties, by the verdict of his judge, without a trial, without any legal process whatsoever? For what are laws instituted but for the protection of our civil interests? If spiritual censures are suffered to interfere with these, is it not manifest that they not only require the sacrifice of a greater portion of individual liberty, than what is requisite for the purposes of civil society, but that they do in fact counteract the design, as well as violate the spirit of civil law itself? It is the unavoidable consequence of constituting that a crime by ecclesiastical canons, which in the civil courts is no crime,—of attempting to enforce religious discipline by temporal penalties,—that either the government of the church must be surrendered altogether to the magistrate, or the protection of the laws rendered nugatory, and the rights and liberties of civil society invaded, by the exercise of a most arbitrary and tyrannical jurisdiction.

Impracticability of maintaining it.

Ecclesiastical discipline, then, adverting to its primary import, the cognizance of matters



of offence or scandal, or the carrying into effect the Apostolic directions with regard to those who walk disorderly, cannot have any existence in a political incorporation. The only end to be answered by appeals to the church, was, the prevention of litigation between fellow Christians before heathen tribunals, by the amicable adjustment of their differences. This end is completely frustrated by the constitution of a national church, and by the necessary publicity of ecclesiastical proceedings. A religious separation from the world, analogous to that which characterized the primitive Christian societies, is impracticable in a church in which religious character does not form an essential prerequisite to communion; where the association of its members takes place under the stern control of secular authority, and neither the minister has power to reject, nor the people are at liberty to withdraw. Those mutual duties, therefore, which are enjoined in the New Testament upon the members of Christian societies, and which pre-suppose a voluntary separate association of believers for purposes of religious edification, cannot be discharged, where there subsists no such mutual relation, as the basis of communion. Whatsoever moral purpose, then, is designed to be answered by the exhibition of the Christian character *collectively*, as distinguishing the fellowship of believers, (and

this was a principal design of the institution of Christian Churches,) that purpose is wholly frustrated by ecclesiastical incorporations, which present to the world only the general unmeaning character of national profession. The "communion of saints" may be maintained as an hypothesis in the creed, but, unless in the intercourse of private life, it cannot be, by the members of such a church, substantially realized. So far as relates to the Church itself, it is reduced to a non-entity.

We may sum up the principles of Nonconformity, relative to the subjects treated in this Book, (principles, we may perceive, the very opposites to those on which national establishments are founded,) in the following positions.

First, That inasmuch as all moral actions are essentially voluntary, that is to say, incapable of being compelled, the conscience cannot be the subject of human legislation, or, in other words, that men, considered as religious beings, are accountable only to their Maker.

Secondly, That inasmuch as Christian churches are founded upon no political relations, and have reference to no political objects, the terms of religious communion must correspond to their constitution as voluntary

associations, and to their design as societies of a purely spiritual or religious character.

Thirdly, That neither political power of any description, nor secular superiority of rank, attaches inherently to any officers in the Christian Church; that the authority of the Christian teacher is, therefore, purely of a moral nature; that ecclesiastical power is abhorrent from the spirit of the Gospel; and that individual election or consent, is the only proper basis of the pastoral claims.

Fourthly, That Church-government, or religious discipline, in a Christian society, has no legitimate purpose but the edification of the whole body, or the spiritual good of the offender; and that spiritual censures, having reference only to the conscience, are incapable of being enforced by the sanctions of civil magistracy.



